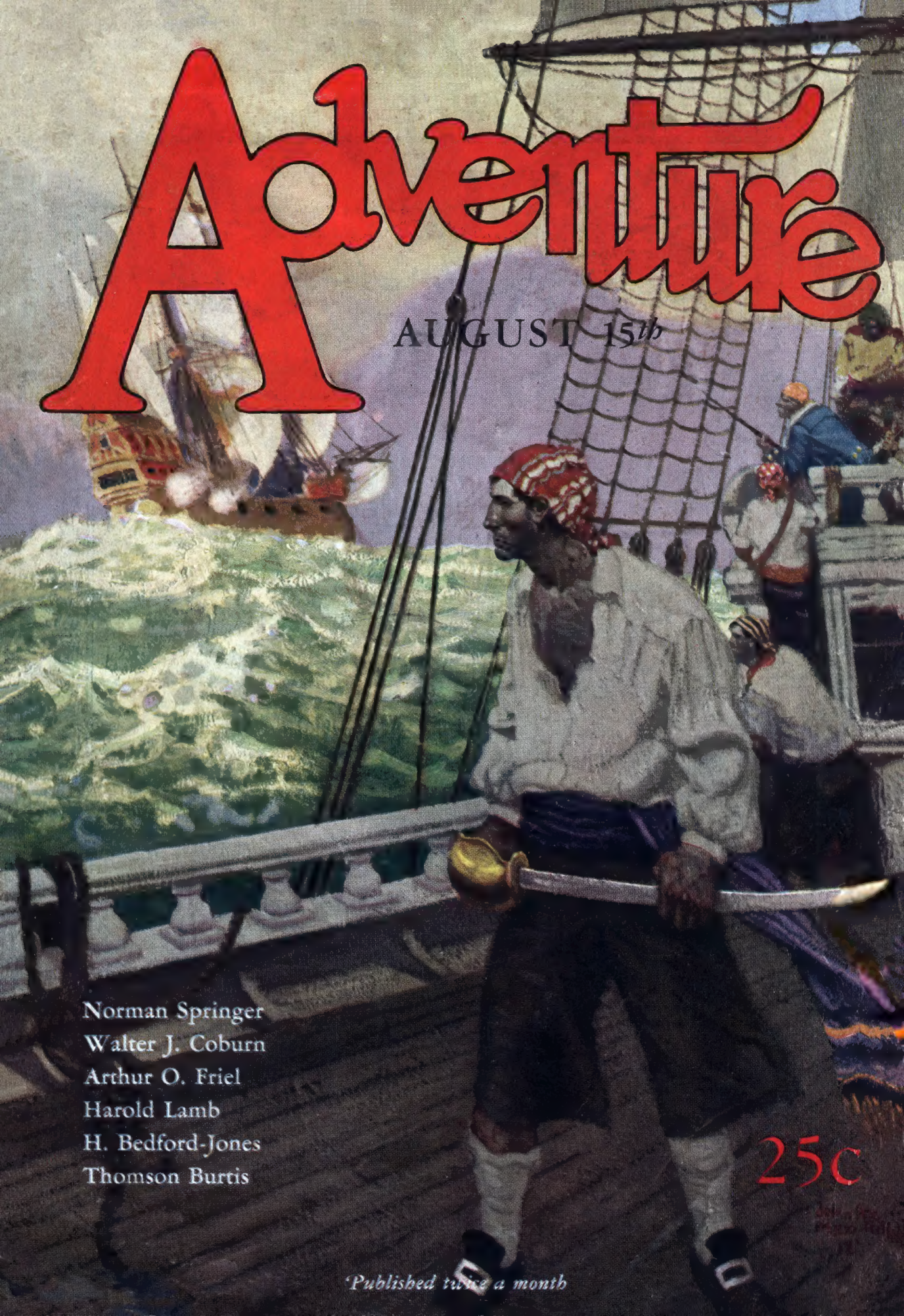
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1927

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*Joseph Cox*
EDITOR

## *Contents for August 15th*

Brown Sees Rio . . . . . NORMAN SPRINGER 2
*A Complete Novelette of the American Gobs in South America*

The Kink . . . . . THOMSON BURTIS 39
*A Story of the Air Mail Service*

Good Medicine . . . . . HARRY G. HUSE 53
*A Story of the West*

Tramp Printer's Old Wandersong . . . N. SUYDAM COWLEY 62
*A Poem*

Men Make Mistakes . . . . . H. BEDFORD-JONES 64
*A Complete Novelette of China Seas*

The Killer . . . . . WALTER J. COBURN 87
*A Story of the Cattle Trails*

Scrooby . . . . . LEONARD H. NASON 107

The Devil's Castle . . . . . ARTHUR O. FREIL 108
*A Three-Part Story of the Orinoco Country. Part II*

The Road Winds Uphill . . . . . EDWARD L. McKENNA 135
*A Story of the Metropolis*

Power . . . . . ROBERT CARSE 144
*A Story of the Sea*

The Guest of Karadak . . . . . HAROLD LAMB 151
*A Complete Novelette of the Arabian Desert*

The Camp-Fire . . . . . 185
Lost Trails . . . . . 191
Old Songs That Men Have Sung 190
Ask Adventure . . . . . 188
Books You Can Believe . . 191
Trail Ahead . . . . . 192

*Decorations by* NEIL O'KEEFFE

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*A Naval Rookie and Brazilian Saints*

# BROWN SEES

THAT morning the southern cruise, subject of conjecture and rumor for weeks past, became an imminent fact. The U. S. S. *Apache* was the lucky ship. An announcement, posted on the scuttle-butt for all to read, stated that the cruiser was detached from service with the squadron and, in four days' time, would sail for the port of Rio de Janeiro, in the country of Brazil, South America.

When the morning newspapers came aboard, it was learned that the off-season cruise was for the purpose of conveying the exalted and much-advertised person of the Honorable Ambrose Kansas Applegate to a diplomatic love feast of the American nations soon to be held in the Brazilian capital. As even the Navy world knew, the Honorable Ambrose Kansas Applegate was Washington's official waver of the olive branch.

He might have been official waver of the national broomstick, for all Fireman Horace Beasley Brown, 2nd class, cared. The amity of the nations was a problem that didn't encroach upon young Mr. Brown's mental activities. Ambrose Kansas Applegate was a name in the papers, and Brown was willing he should remain so. But Rio de Janeiro—that was different.

Rio de Janeiro! Good old Rio! Rolling down to Rio!

When a man is eighteen years old, and has joined the Navy to see and behold the far and foreign parts of this world, and has thus far seen and beheld only the excessively unforeign regions of Norfolk and Philadelphia, the name Rio de Janeiro possesses an immense psychic significance. It isn't just a name, it isn't just a spigotty port. It is—well, it is everything and anything the vaulting mind of an eighteen year old rookie gob wants it to be.

Good old Rio! Horace Beasley Brown had never shone particularly in the study of geography in the little red schoolhouse on the Iowa plain, but that marvelous instrument of modern education, the motion picture, had taught him what to expect of a place called Rio de Janeiro. Palm trees and monkeys, of course, and sloe-eyed brown girls in skimpy grass petticoats, black-browed villains with knives between their jaws and an honest, handsome young blond American—named Brown, mayhap—setting things to rights.

Good old Rio! Heat and color and

*A Complete Novelette*

# RIO

By NORMAN SPRINGER

foreignness, and Old Glory going to the top of the pole. Rio de Janeiro—a name to conjure with, to dream about.

Which was just what Horace Beasley Brown was doing as he reclined on a shady patch of forecastle deck in the lee of the forward turret. Dreaming about it. He stared up at the blue Virginia sky, but what he saw was Rio; he saw himself in Rio.

His friends and mentors, Oiler Henry "Red" Pentlock and Oiler James Roscoe Hughes, enjoying with Brown this loaf in the shade, ranged not so far afield in their thoughts and conversation. Rio was more than a name to them; they'd been there. They sported crows and hash-marks on their sleeves; they knew the world, especially the foreign parts thereof, and home was more interesting to them, this floating home beneath their recumbent forms.

"Wonder who the new warrant'll be?" was the question on Pentlock's mind.

"Aw, some piece of cheese," hazarded Hughes. "Won't be our luck to draw another prince like old Williams."

Brown stirred restlessly. This intrusion of domestic affairs upon his fairy foreign vision of tropic and coral strands was disconcerting. How could a guy think when they jawed about warrants? The new warrant—huh!—what ice did he cut?

In Brown's rookie mind, warrant officers were remote and quite unimportant figures. He hadn't got their status straight in his mind as yet. They didn't seem to touch his life, like the one-striper who appeared to own the division, or the C. P. O. who gave him work to do, or the Jimmylegs who saw to it that he didn't do what he wanted to do. Warrant officers were far-away men, and not important or awesome like those other far-away men, the Big Chief who scowled in the log-room, and that tremendous pair, the First Luff and the Old Man, who led a shadowy and magnificent existence far away aft, and emerged into the light of the enlisted

world only to pronounce doom upon distressed gobs at mast.

Jawing about a warrant, when they might talk about Rio de Janeiro! There were times when Brown grew positively impatient with his companions. But he supposed it was the mark of age on them. When he was twenty-eight and had been everywhere and seen everything, he supposed he wouldn't get excited about Rio either. Or about warrants, he'd bet.

Of course, he'd felt sorry when Warrant Machinist Williams went ashore to the naval hospital to have his stomach cut open. Everybody felt sorry, so he felt sorry. Really, it was a mean thing to do to an old man—and Brown had heard things about that hospital; he'd heard that over there the black bottle was the favorite medicine. Poor old Williams, he thought, was a sure goner. But then, he'd heard Red say that Williams was forty-five if he was a day, and a man can't expect to live forever.

But there is a difference between being sorry and being worried. Brown couldn't see that it mattered who got old Williams' job as senior warrant officer in the engineer's department. He couldn't remember that old Williams had ever done anything except attend quarters on Sunday morning all dressed up and, the rest of the week, wander rather aimlessly about the huge power plant on the bottom of the ship, dressed in dungarees.

"You awful rookie," said Pentlock, severely. "You mean to say you been in this man's Navy all of four months and you don't know no better than that? What does it matter? Say, Jimmy, look what we been sweatin' over and trying to learn the Navy to, and he up and says, 'What does a warrant matter?' What d'you know about that?"

"Say, kid, what do you think old Williams did down below?" asked Hughes.

Brown answered truthfully that he had never seen old Williams do anything down below.

"Huh!" snorted Pentlock. "If we draw one of these yappy squirts you'll learn something. Why, kid, the warrant machinist is the guy that really runs the works down below. Things was easy going in our engine-room because old Williams was a fine feller, what knew his business besides, and so things went along on greased wheels. You never heard old Williams bawl out a man, did you? No. But wait till the next feller takes charge. Huh! Say, Jimmy, if we drawed 'Froggy' Slade the kid'd learn something about what a warrant mattered, hey?"

Hughes suddenly sat straight up. Alarm was in his face and a note of real distress in his voice.

"Aw, for crimminy sakes, Red, what put that in your head?"

"I don't know," confessed the other. "Just had a kinda feeling when I seen old Williams go over the side this morning. 'What if we get Froggy Slade?' Hit me just like that."

"Swell thinker you got," complained Hughes. "Thinkin' up a jinx like that."

"Feller can't help his thinks, can he?" Pentlock defended himself. "Don't mean anything. Fat chance this wagon has of catching Slade. He's holding down a nice grafting job in the Navy Yard, and I hear as all the civilians in Portsmouth are going inside the walls to get their bootleg nowadays. Think Slade'd leave a fat thing like that?"

Hughes reclined again, but he still grumbled.

"Ain't good luck to have thinks like that, nohow. Slade—my ——, I'll dream about the —— tonight."

"Forget it," counseled Pentlock; and to the mystified Brown he added, "Say, kid, pass me one of them tailor-mades, that's a good kid."

Brown dug the box of cigarets out of his jumper pocket. Once or twice a faint suspicion had hovered on the threshold of his mind; maybe these twin idols of his enjoyed the "tailor-made" cigarets—so plentifully supplied him by his elder brother, Herman Beasley Brown, who kept a cigar store in Des Moines—as much as his worshipful companionship. They certainly smoked a lot of them.

But then, Brown didn't care; cigarets were a cheap price to pay for idols' smiles.

"Here y'are," said Brown. "Pass 'em to Jimmy. Who's Slade?"

Pentlock stretched his long body, exhaled a white cloud and chuckled.

"Hey, Jimmy, the kid wants to know who is Slade?"

Hughes stretched his short body and spoke in a voice that fairly dripped venom.

"Slade," said he, "well, Slade is—" and he stretched the genealogy of Slade in three short words.

"Oh," said Brown.

"And besides that," said Pentlock, "he's Francis Xavier Slade, Warrant Machinist, U. S. N.; he's *Mister* Slade, Bub, and don't you ever forget it if you meet up with him in this man's Navy. He's only Froggy and what Jimmy called him when he ain't around."

Hughes took occasion to supplement his previous description: this Slade had, it appeared, many faults and defects aside from his canine origin. The little oiler cursed him up and down and across the middle, and did it with cold passion.

"Yeh, that's him," added the big oiler. "Likewise, he's an officer and a—well, almost a gentleman, seein' he holds a warrant. Yeh, almost. You want to remember him, kid. When you say your prayers tonight you want to remember he's one guy you don't want to remember. Don't you ever ask no blessings on a man named Slade."

"I guess you guys don't like him," was Brown's sapient conclusion.

## II

DESPITE Red Pentlock's admonition, Brown promptly forgot the name of Slade. Too much Rio on his mind. But the much-cursed name battered against his ears again on the very afternoon before sailing.

It was down in the starboard engine-room, and young Brown was busy at his cleaning station. That is, he was as busy as he could force himself to be. It was hard work shining up a pump that tomorrow would be wagging up and down on its joyous way to Rio. This afternoon the squat, ugly chunk of steel and brass had a most disconcerting trick of changing into a palm-fringed coral strand beneath his very hands—and then, of course, he must stop being busy, and peer and muse.

The conversation at his back filtered slowly into his bemused mind. Hughes and Pentlock had cleaning stations on the main engines just a few yards distant, and it was this propinquity, combined with Brown's unfailing supply of tailor-mades, that gave birth to his intimacy with them. When they talked together he usually listened in; he learned lots of queer things about the Navy in this way. If his own tongue had the impulse to wag, his two good friends did not squelch him with profane scorn as the other old-timers squelched other rookies. They listened courteously, and borrowed cigarets.

So Brown gave attention to the talk; not at first his entire mind, for seven-eighths of it remained in Rio, but enough of it to become aware that Jimmy Hughes was excited about something.

The little oiler had been topside, on a routine mid-afternoon visit to scuttle butt and head and the bulletin board in front of the engineers' log-room. Jimmy hadn't been looking for any particular information, merely for some item of news or rumor that would furnish a little gossip down below. Apparently he got more than he was looking for.

"You make me sick!" he said fiercely to Pentlock. "You and your hunches—y'big slab o' cheese!"

"Yeh?" said Pentlock. His tone indicated he was only casually interested; perhaps no more interested than the near-by rookie.

"Nice sort of friend you are," continued Hughes. "Gol-darned jinx, if you ask me. You and your feelin's!"

There was a distressed note in Hughes' voice that jerked some more of Brown's attention away from Rio.

"My, my," said Pentlock.

He stopped his slow and careful rubbing of a steel column of the engine frame, which he had rubbed slowly and carefully for two years past, and would rub slowly and carefully for two years to come. He straightened his long body and gazed anxiously at Hughes.

"What's the matter, honey?" he inquired. "Swaller your slum the wrong way?"

"Slade's aboard," said Hughes shortly.

Pentlock's expression changed slowly from the facetious to one of mingled consternation and amazement. His parted lips puckered into a whistle.

"Just seen him topside, goin' into old Williams' room," added Hughes. "He'd just come aboard."

"Into Williams' room?" muttered Pentlock.

"And into Williams' boots—so Yeoman Payne says," continued Hughes.

There was silence for a moment while the two oilers looked at each other. It was a curious look they exchanged, and it withdrew several more fractions of Brown's attention from the distant shores of Rio; Brown even remembered that he had heard this name, Slade, before.

"Well, all I got to say," said Pentlock at last, "is 'Oh, dear me!' "

And then he proceeded to say other things. He swore like a pirate. He swore with a width of expression and a depth of feeling Brown had never before known. Even the mule-skinners of Iowa could not swear like this. Brown listened admiringly.

"And that's all I got to say," concluded Pentlock, "but I wish this here was somebody we know," and he kicked savagely at the inoffensive tin box which held his cleaning gear. The box went scuttering over the floor plates, spilling its varied contents and coming to rest against Brown's shin bone. It was a sharp blow, and drew a sharp yelp.

"Yeh, you tell the world," said Red to Brown. "Yeh, you got a right to squawk. The Frog's aboard, and now we got fun—yeh, I don't think."

"What's eatin' you guys?" was the wittiest retort Brown could muster on the spur of the moment.

Even now, with consternation and bitter rage exhibited by veterans before his very eyes, Horace Beasley Brown's rookie mind remained unimpressed. Privately, Brown thought his elders were making a ridiculous fuss about an inconsequential matter. What if a frog were aboard? What if a dozen new warrant officers paraded the decks? They were still bound for Rio in the morning.

Jimmy and Red evidently didn't like this Mr. Slade; and the latter, Brown gathered, was hard to get on with. This Slade, thought Brown, must be like the young duty-struck gunnery lieutenant who harried the men in the third division. But, pshaw, why worry about a thing like that? Even Brown, short as was his period of service, had acquired skill in passing the buck, and he knew that his friends, Jimmy and Red, were adepts at this good old Navy game. They had taught him what he knew. Brown couldn't imagine his friends being seriously disturbed by any officer. They didn't like the guy, and were just blowing off steam, concluded Brown.

Much more interesting and important, Brown considered the news that skipped from mouth to mouth in the black gang's washroom just after knock-off time. The Great Man was aboard. Little "Fuzzy" Peete, the log-room messenger boy, had actually seen him. "Big pot-belly in a high hat," Fuzzy described him. "Swaller-tail coat, too. Darned if he ain't like a frog."

At the other end of the washroom a group of old-timers were also bandying that word "frog." But Fuzzy Peete's frog was much the more interesting to Brown. With the Honorable Ambrose Kansas Applegate actually on board, the last doubt was laid and all rumor mongers definitely refuted. The ship would sail for Rio in the morning.

The ship did sail. For once in his short Naval career Horace Beasley Brown "showed a leg" before demand, and

when the Jimmylegs' get-'em-up stick whanged against the bottom of his hammock, it was labor lost. For Brown was already up. He was up with the first toot of the bugle, and he was into uniform of the day long before breakfast.

Later, when anchor was weighed and the first tremor of movement ran through the ship, Brown fell into quarters on the forecastle and sniffed gleefully of the open water ahead. Not a backward glance did he bestow upon his native heath. In fact, he didn't care if he never saw Virginia Capes again. The wide world and all the waters thereof were Brown's desire.

When the ship steamed by "Air-bedding Buoy," his hitherto farthest offshore, and left behind that expanse of placid water known colloquially as "Swing Ship Acres," a certain diffidence and humility dropped forever from the shoulders—and the manners—of Fireman Brown.

Rookie and landlubber no longer. Not he. Now he was a real son of the briny; he trod a heaving deck and looked upon blue water; he was voyaging to foreign parts, across the Line to Rio. Although the big cruiser rode upon the quiet sea with hardly perceptible motion, there was a real deep-sea roll in Brown's swagger as he went below to stand his first steaming watch.

Brown stood his sea-watches in the fire-room. He dug black coal out of black bunkers and cast it into the fiery maws beneath the boilers. With one hundred other rookies, he learned abruptly that a summertime cruise into the tropics is not all play for the black gang.

He learned that there is practically no limit to the amount of sweat that can stream out of a man in a four-hour watch, or to the amount of coal a boiler can eat in the same length of time. He learned that while he might be a carefree rover of the wide waters when he was above decks, down here in the pit he was a slave to a brazen gong, and to the ever quivering finger on the steam dial.

There were hours during those first few days at sea when Horace Beasley Brown regretted that he had ever lusted to see and to behold, and wished he had never heard of the United States Navy. In retrospect, Iowa looked good.

But these regrets were momentary and infrequent. The fire-room was not so bad after his fibers toughened, and there were things a rookie might learn, down there between the boilers' walls upon the bottom of the ship—curious things about ships and men and the sea.

Brown was so busy working, eating and sleeping that he didn't see so much of his friends as formerly. Red and Jimmy had tasks upon the main engines, and they stood a different watch from that of Brown. They were in the new warrant machinist's watch—Mr. Slade's watch. Brown's mind was too full of the various and curious things he was learning to wonder much about Mr. Slade.

Yet among the things he learned was the fact that his shipmates held various and conflicting opinions regarding the new warrant. His older shipmates, that is, for the other recruits were much like Brown; they were too busy and preoccupied to form an opinion. But the second cruise men generally said they liked "Froggy" Slade.

"A good scout, Froggy is," they said. "Ain't stuck up like most of 'em; he remembers he was a gob once himself."

On the other hand the real old-timers, men like Pentlock and Hughes, who were both third cruise men, and the older and grizzled ancients like Paddy Sloan and Marty Pitzer, who remembered this man's Navy when it *was* a Navy, and not a double-blanked and triple-starred day nursery—so they said—adopted a very different and contrasting attitude toward the new warrant machinist.

They didn't say much; not nearly as much as the younger fellows. But Brown noticed that they squinted down their noses when the subject of Slade came up. They spat, and changed the subject. They talked all around the man, but not of him. Even the two oilers did not overvoice their feelings toward Mr. Slade. The inattentive rookie realized vaguely

that in some way Slade's presence threatened Jimmy Hughes' peace and well-being. That was all he did realize.

At this stage of the voyage the other stranger aboard was much more interesting to Brown. The Hon. Ambrose Kansas Applegate meant something important to Brown; he was a symbol of strange delights to come. Applegate and Rio; cause and effect. Besides, the envoy would be something to write home about. Carrying Applegate to Rio—that would impress them. Probably get into the paper at home. A. K. Applegate was not unknown in Iowa.

One morning, peering down from the spar deck, Brown watched the great man pace the quarterdeck with the skipper. Brown's awe was of the latter figure, but his lively interest was centered upon the civilian. He had a very good view of the pair, especially when they walked toward him.

The man of words marched with his hands clasped behind his back, his toes outflung to forty-five degrees. In striped flannels and striped shirt and with a gaily striped band about his panama, the Honorable Applegate stood out conspicuously against the plain white of his companion's dress. He had, Brown noticed, very thin and oddly bowed legs, and his paunch wobbled when he walked; but his face was jolly, and very red. When he laughed, he laughed all over; and he appeared to laugh a lot at his own sayings. When he wasn't laughing he was talking, and the great mouth, which had made him the great man he was, opened like a cave to let the words tumble out. The boom of them reached even to Brown.

"Like a big old croakin' frog," thought Brown, of the Honorable Ambrose Kansas Applegate.

## III

A FEW hours later, down in the fire-room, Brown had his first sight of the other frog. Perhaps the relieving warrant officer was late. Whatever reason, Mr. Slade, who was overseer of the relieved watch, came through the fire-rooms after eight bells had struck and the fresh men had gone on duty.

Brown, snatching a breath of air beneath a ventilator, looked up to see a dungaree-clad figure coming through the doorway from the opposite fire-room. At first glimpse, Brown thought it was the great man from aft come down to see the monkeys perform. In general outline the men were twins—same thin bandy legs, same wobbling paunches, even the same shaped face, wider at the jaws than at the forehead. But a second glance informed Brown this was a very different person, indeed. This was the other frog. This was Slade, whom Jimmy and Red hated so bitterly.

Perhaps his friendship colored Brown's view. He was prepared to dislike Mr. Slade, and he did—at sight. He saw nothing jolly about the warrant machinist's face; it was not rubicund and mirthful, like the face he had seen top-side; it was dead white, and smooth, and hard, and although the great mouth—as huge as that other mouth—gaped at the fire-room in a smile, Brown noticed that Mr. Slade's eyes didn't smile. They watched. No, Brown didn't like Froggy Slade.

He was positive he didn't like him when, coming off watch next morning, he was told that Jimmy Hughes was on report, and at Warrant Machinist Slade's instance. He found Jimmy and Red in conference in a drum-room. The former was explaining the disaster.

"Changin' clothes in the bag alley, and happened to have a cig in my mush," explained the little oiler. "Froggy spotted me—I seen him go by the after door and look at me—and, by golly, if he didn't go fetch the leatherneck and point me out. The leatherneck didn't want to do it. Why, he passed me just a minute before. But what could the poor stiff do but slap me down, when a broken stripe had pointed me out? Onery stuff, but slick enough, ain't it? Froggy won't appear at all, and I'll get another spot o' red on my record. Yep, Red, he's opened the ball, and I guess little Jimmy'll be steppin' lively from now on."

"If we knew what's his game this time, maybe we could do something," said Red. "That is—if he's got a game."

"Any time Frank Slade ain't got a game, I'll believe Avon Street's got religion," asserted Hughes. "Froggy without a graft? G'wan! What's he want to catch this trip for?"

"Maybe orders," hazarded Red.

Jimmy snorted sceptically.

"With wires to pull here and whispers to whisper there, and that brother-in-law's cousin—whoever it is—backing him up in the department—why, Slade practically picks his billet, and you know it."

"Maybe they got wise to him at the Navy Yard," said Red. "Or tired of him, and transferred him out quick when a call came for a warrant. You know, that always happens to him finally."

"Yeh, that's so," admitted Jimmy. "But I bet it ain't so this time. Froggy's here on a graft, to make some money. I got a hunch, and you know what my hunches are when it comes to that guy. But he didn't know I was aboard—he's kind of lost track of me since the *West Vermont*. I tell you, when he seen me the other day he turned three colors. Yeh, and he's set out to 'liminate me, so there won't be no mussing up his play, whatever his game is—besides getting even for all them other things. Yeh, I'm in Dutch, all right. You know Slade's way—lot of little things till the Old Man gets sick of seein' you at mast, and then some kind of slick frame-up. Remember Johnny Hartman?"

Red swore deeply and bitterly. But his advice was mild enough.

"You watch your step," he said.

To all this Fireman Brown listened without much understanding. A personal feud between an officer and an enlisted man was something he'd not yet observed, and he hadn't known that such an active enmity could exist. The worlds were too far apart for any personal relations, even those of hatred. He did know that a warrant officer wasn't exactly a real officer; but if, in the rigid Navy code, his broken stripe placed him even a step below the callowest commissioned youth from the Academy, it also placed him a whole flight of steps above the highest rated enlisted man in the service.

Brown could understand an officer's having a "down" on a fellow, and "riding" him because of it, but this thing Jimmy hinted at was much more than a mere down. It wasn't just spite that the two oilers feared from Slade; it was something else, something dark and evil, that had its roots in the past.

So much Brown sensed. But he didn't think about it. Indeed, about all Brown could think was, "Gee, what if he'd seen me smoking?" For Brown, like everybody else in the engineers' division, often puffed at a cigaret in the berth deck passages known as the "bag alleys." The region was officially out of smoking bounds, but it was a regulation that had never been enforced since Brown was on the ship. So long as a fellow didn't actually puff his smoke into the face of a passing sentry or of a wandering master-at-arms, nothing was ever said or done about it.

As for an officer's going to the trouble of getting a man reported for this trivial offense—why, Brown had never heard of such a thing. Why, Jimmy might even lose his liberty in Rio over it! To a man who had seen only Norfolk and Philadelphia, this was an awful fate to contemplate.

"Yeh, most likely," Hughes agreed when Brown voiced his fear. "What's the diff? I don't think much of these spiggoty ports, anyway. Give me Norfolk or Philly for a good time. No, it ain't the liberty I'm thinking about."

"Gosh, that guy's a lemon, if you ask me," said Brown.

"We didn't, Bub," said Red, "but if you ask me, why, a lemon's a sugar plum to our dear Froggy—eh, Jimmy?"

Jimmy laughed. It was a carefree and unworried laugh despite his recent words. Brown gazed admiringly at him; he didn't think he could laugh if he were on report and facing possible restriction to the ship at this time of all times. Indeed,

just being on report loomed dreadfully large in Brown's eyes; he'd never been to mast, and the very thought of going there gave him a queasy feeling.

BROWN'S fears accurately forecast the oiler's punishment. Thirty days' restriction to the ship, the captain said, "and don't let me see you here again, m'lad."

"And that's that," said Hughes, as he lighted one of Brown's tailor-mades, sitting on his ditty box in the bag alley that night after taps. "It ain't much of a score for Froggy, but it's a beginning."

It soon appeared that it was but a beginning—or else Jimmy Hughes' luck had strangely taken a turn for the worse. The latter opinion was the one generally held by the division, for the partnership of Hughes and Pentlock did not advertise the belief that Jimmy's bad luck was inspired. But the multiple hash-mark men, even the shellac-pickled old shellbacks like Sloan and Pitzer, began to back Hughes into corners and wag solemn, warning heads at him.

Once Brown heard old Sloan declaim:

"I tell ye, bye, old Nick himself, could learn a trick or two from thot felly. A laugh to your face and a knife in your back—niver a man can do it better than Frank Slade."

Three days after the smoking episode, Oiler Hughes was on report again. A rather more serious infraction of the rules this time. A friendly poker game, sitting in fancied security in an empty coal-bunker long after taps, was raided by a newly rated and zealous master-at-arms. Jimmy was one of the players.

"What, you here again?" said the captain at next morning's mast. "Hrump!"

The case distressed the captain. He played poker himself. But discipline must be maintained. Jimmy won an added thirty days restriction and, with his fellow gamblers, sacrificed five days' pay.

"Now how in —— did Froggy find out about that game?" demanded the disciplined one plaintively.

Red Pentlock was profanely scornful.

"You little dumbell," he addressed his friend, "ain't I told you to watch your step? How'd he find out? Huh! As if the Frog'd be aboard a ship a week and not know what was goin' on!"

"Why, Slade didn't do it this time, did he?" inquired Brown innocently. "I thought it was the Jimmylegs."

The punished one chuckled, and the scornful one transferred his scorn to the innocent.

"And how did the Jimmylegs get wise? Not from a word dropped sort of casual like into his ear? Oh, no. And when a certain plot-bellied, fat-headed warrant machinist we know about was seen chewing the rag with that Jimmylegs up on the spar deck—why, of course, he was just passin' the time of day like a warrant and almost a gentleman might do with a gob—just mentioning the weather, and maybe where a guy could get a good drink in Rio? Oh, yes! Huh!"

The evidence didn't seem conclusive to Brown. But he accepted it. If his friends blamed Slade, then he blamed Slade. He felt very sorry for Jimmy—who wouldn't get ashore in Rio. He wished he could do something to hurt Slade. He wished he could do something to help Jimmy. So he gave the little oiler his last package of tailor-mades and started smoking self-rolled ones.

Three days later Oiler Hughes was again on report. The offense this time was more serious than either of the previous offenses. "Malingering on watch" it went upon the book, and a very red mark indeed it made. Reported by the C. P. O. standing throttle-watch in the starboard engine-room, where Oiler Hughes was on duty.

"I always thought that gink was a skunk," said Hughes. "I been watching him thaw out when Froggy calls him by his first name and tells him stories in the night-watches—yeh, makes him proud to have a warrant slappin' him on the back."

"You blamed rummy, ain't I been tellin' you to watch your step?" raged his chum. "If you was wise to him, what'd you give the chance for?"

"Fat chance I had to sidestep," was the rejoinder. "I tell you I was around them journals not five minutes before, and then I went into the shaft alley, and when I came out there was a smoking bearing. Yeh, and it seems Froggy went around the engine when I was gone and he didn't feel no hot bearing.

"Yeh! A little emery, I guess. But he just suggested to the C. P. O. that I was loafing on the job, the way I figure it, and then he beat it into your engine-room before I showed up. That's what Krause, who was upon the grating, told me. Anyway, when I come out of the shaft alley, there was the bearing burning up, and I had to turn the salt water into it to cool it down—and that skinny stiff at the throttle telling me I'm on report for letting it happen."

At mast Jimmy got another month's restriction to the ship, and lost ten days' pay.

"You'll mend your ways, m'lad, if you know what is good for you," said the captain. "I'm sick and tired of seeing you here."

"At this rate," said Jimmy, "I won't get ashore until I'm paid off."

"Or on your way to Portsmouth," said Red significantly. "This here business is getting serious."

"No, I ain't forgot poor Johnny Hartman," said Jimmy. "But what can we do? So far I can't figure him out this trip at all, and unless I do figure him out I just got to take what he hands me. And that's that!" The little oiler slumped despondently. "It's either beat it, or take a general and a bob—that's what he's aimin' for, I bet."

Red grunted, and swore, and then went up on the forecastle and picked a fight with a deckhand. It was all he could think of doing. But that night he discovered another and more agreeable way of expressing his sentiments for his friend's enemy. And it was Brown, the innocent, who pointed the way.

"Call that guy Slade hard-boiled?" demanded Brown scornfully. "*Huh*—why, he's scared of rats. Runs away from 'em. Romeo was just tellin' me about it."

Romeo was the Filipino mess-boy who took care of the warrant officers' quarters. Men like Jimmy Hughes and Red Pentlock, who sported crows and hashmarks, and had a position in the division to uphold, rarely spoke to mess-boys, and never associated with them. But a rookie, like Brown, need not be so particular.

"Yeh, Romeo says Froggy come off watch this afternoon," continued Brown, "and pretty soon he come runnin' out of his room squealin' like a pig, Romeo says, and all because there was a rat into his room—and Froggy yellin' to Romeo to chase it out. Scared, he was. Just a rat! Romeo says he took his time about it, and busted a picture with his broom, because he don't like Froggy any more'n we do. Just an old rat, and it had him scared stiff!"

"Rats," said Red, reflectively. "Hum—rats."

"Yeh, he's scared of rats and lizards and things like that," Jimmy remarked, with indifference. "Don't you remember, Red, that time on the *West Vermont* when Nosey Parker, that gunners' mate in the first division, played a trick on him—well, no, I guess that was before your time. You didn't come to us until afterwards.

"Nosey was sore because Slade gyped him on a six-for-five debt—Slade was still lendin' then, through Flannery, even if he was already a warrant—and what does Nosey do but get one of these here little lizards like they was selling to women to wear on their shirt waists—chameleons, they call 'em—and he got a kid in his division, who said he was a reformed dip, to slip the thing into Froggy's coat pocket where he kept his plug.

"I didn't see it, but they said it was pretty rich when Froggy stuck his hand in to get a chew. Yeh, rats and lizards and things like that get his goat. Funny. Bein' a snake himself, you'd think he'd like creepy things. But lots of guys feel that way."

"Rats," said Red slowly, "ain't so hard to catch."

"Yeh, you could slip a live rat into Froggy's pocket, you could!" scoffed Hughes. "Or a dead one either. Nope, he's hep to us."

"There's a ventilator opening above the door to his room," said Red.

"Aw, what good'd that do?" objected the other. "If the rat'd bite him, there might be some sense to it. But it'd only run one way while he run another. What's the sense of runnin' the risk just to see him throw a fit? I'm in Dutch enough already."

"You ain't goin' to have anything to do with it," announced Red.

"Oh, gosh, you goin' to slip him a rat, Red?" spoke up a very excited and round-eyed rookie.

"Huh? Well, if I didn't clean forget you were sittin' over there," was Red's response. "Why—no, Bub, not that—oh, no, no, not at all. Ain't even thinkin' of it. And you mustn't think such things, either, let alone sayin' them. Why, if you went out of this drum-room and spoke up like that, like as not you'd be on report; like as not somethin' mysterious would happen to you, and you never would see that dear Rio. Even thinkin' like that, let alone talkin' about it!"

"I—I won't," promised Brown.

But next morning, when he awakened to a buzz of rumor, he found it hard not to talk, and impossible not to think, about it. For last night something had happened down on the berth deck, in or adjacent to the warrant officers' quarters. Rats had happened. A whole company of rats had invaded and taken possession of that quarter of the ship, turning the broken stripers out on the cold deck in their shifts. Seven large rats had without warning viciously attacked whichever warrant officer the speaker liked least and practically made a sieve of him. One rat, big as a cat and ferocious as a wolf—so Fuzzy Peete averred on his honor—had laid in wait for Warrant Machinist Slade and bit the end off his left big toe as he was clambering into bed. Fuzzy said he had it straight—a marine had told him.

In the privacy of the drum-room Brown found the friends in conference.

"Well, it did bite him," Red was saying, as Brown joined them. "Nipped his little finger. My ——, you'd 'a' thought he'd lost a arm!"

Jimmy chuckled appreciatively. The little oiler was in a happier state of mind than Brown had seen him for the past week, even though his words still were pessimistic.

"Ain't done nothing but make him mad," said he, "but, crimmy, I'd like to been there and seen him!"

"Well, we found out he sleeps raw this hot weather, anyhow," said Pentlock thoughtfully. "That might come in handy. Queer lookin' jasper, that guy is—raw."

"What good does knowin' that do us?" was Jimmy's query. "Why, half the private roomers sleep raw in the tropics."

"I know, but yuh never can tell," answered Red. "Might come in handy. And then, there's the chief. Might be something in that. His room's just abaft, near the ward-room, and the row woke him up. He yelled to the leatherneck what was the matter, and the leatherneck says a rat bit Mr. Slade; so the Chief says, 'Tell him to bite it back and stop his racket!' Might be something in that."

"Yeh, the Chief's wise to Froggy," assented Hughes. "Remember, he was staff lieutenant on the *West Vermont* and lost his shirt on that boat race like every one else. Yeoman Payne told me the Chief swore somethin' fierce when he found out he was drawin' Slade for old Williams' billet. Chief says it was just his luck to get a —— crook like Slade. That's what he thinks of Slade. He don't love Froggy, but he don't love me neither. I been in too many scrapes this cruise. So what difference does it make?"

"He's a square-shooter," said Red. "If you got anythin' on Froggy, he'd try and give you the break."

"Yeh, but we ain't got anything on Froggy," commented Jimmy sadly. "And sickin' rats on him won't give us anything. Don't do it again or he'll get wise somebody's causing rats to pick on him. That racket'd only be good if we had something on him. Cut it out, Red."

"Uh huh," agreed Red. "Maybe," he added hopefully, "he'll get blood poison. That was a scabby lookin' rat."

"Not Froggy; it's the poor rat that'll get it," was Jimmy's opinion.

"Gee, Red, it didn't bite you, did it?" burst out Fireman Brown. He gazed worshipfully at his hero. "Gee, did yuh have to pick it up, Red?"

"Huh? Didn't what bite me when?" queried the tall oiler, blandly, but with a certain glint in his eye that the rookie found disconcerting.

"Have to pick up what?" queried the short oiler, and there was a hint of an edge in his soft voice.

"Why — why — er — I don't know," floundered Brown.

Red nodded.

"He don't know," he said to his partner. "I tell you, Jimmy, the kid's improvin'. Yep, he's learnin' fast." To the blushing youth he added, "You stick to that, kid. You don't know. You don't know a —— thing. That's the way to get along in this man's Navy. You stick to that, Bub, and you'll have a nice crow on your arm one o' these days—not to mention havin' both eyes open and all your teeth in when we steam into Rio tomorrow morning."

## IV

"SO THIS," said Horace Beasley Brown, "is Rio!"

"Absotively," said Red, quickening his pace as he sensed Brown was about to slacken his. "Come on, kid, step along. We don't want tc lose him."

Brown obediently stepped along. It was a half-run to keep up with Red's long legs. It was most uncomfortable, stepping along thus, with the thermometer, Brown guessed, somewhere around a thousand in the shade. Beneath the padded shoulders of his white mustering jumper—that garment which looks so cool, and isn't—little rivulets were trickling down his ribs, down his thighs, down his legs. He itched. His feet burned. He was dry.

"Yeh, we'll lick up a cold one pretty soon," promised Red. "If he's goin' where it looks like he's headed for, we'll empty a keg. C'mon, step along!"

Brown couldn't see any sense to it. This chasing through narrow, cobbled streets, trying to keep within sight of a flivver taxi with a vermillion top which bumped and crept ahead of them. Crept, but all too fast for the short legs of Horace Beasley Brown. It was over a block ahead, but he could still see the white speck of Warrant Machinist Slade's white cap through the back window.

No sense to it. Why the dickens did Red want to go chasing Froggy Slade through the streets of Rio? And why the dickens was Froggy being driven through these winding alleys, instead of along that wide, beautiful avenue Red had hurried him across? No sense to it. This wasn't the way to see foreign parts—chasing a red flivver through a lot of alleys!

"You'll see an eyeful by and by," said Red. "C'mon."

Brown puffed, but he kept up. Brown was chubby; he wasn't built for speed; he resented unnecessary speed. He didn't care whether they did lose Slade. He never wanted to see Slade again. He thought Red should never want to see Slade again, either—what with poor Jimmy languishing in the brig this very moment. He wished that —— flivver would blow up with Slade in it, or that a hole would open up in the street and forever swallow auto, Slade and all. He wished it weren't so hot. Oof! it was hot. So this was Rio!

So far it was disappointing. Very disappointing. First, days and days of gazing across a wide expanse of harbor at a row of palm trees and a lot of white

buildings behind them, with his heart in his eyes. "See the world through a port hole! Yah!" Brown was growing up; he was getting cynical about this man's Navy.

Then—this. Dingy alleys, and a lot of coons. Might as well be in Norfolk—only difference was that there he'd know what the blacks and tans were saying, and here they were chattering spiggoty. Why didn't they keep to the big streets? Looked like there was something to see there.

"Stow the guff—c'mon," admonished Red.

Brown heaved and puffed, and kept up. He almost wished Red hadn't invited him to come along when they stepped ashore from the liberty boat. Almost—but not quite.

Six days Brown had lusted to press foot upon Rio's shore. Here he was, pressing both feet altogether too fast to suit him. Six days ago the U. S. S. *Apache* had entered the harbor—with her bunker chutes standing and bunker holes open and ready. The Great North American Zephyr had gone ashore, with his olive branch bestowed presumably in his coat-tails. The captain had gone ashore. The other officers had gone ashore and returned, gone ashore and returned—even the warrant officers, even Froggy Slade. Every evening Mr. Slade went ashore. But the enlisted men did not go ashore.

"No liberty before coaling ship," said the executive office.

That was all right; that was to be expected. Empty bunkers had to be filled. But where was the coal?

For forty-eight hours a ship's company asked that question, at first quietly, then loudly, then most profanely. No sign of coal—and no liberty until after coaling ship.

When, at dawn on the third morning, a collier slid out of the white mist that covered the bay and moored beside, she was welcomed with a cheer that should have been heard on Corcovado Hill—and probably was. Eight hundred odd gobs were tigers for work that day. For the ship's schedule was known.

Ashore the olive branch was being waved to a fare-ye-well, in the white marble palace that could be seen from the forecastle, and the great bray of the North was competing with the assorted brays of the South. The love feast would end before the week, and Sunday would see them homeward bound. And—no liberty until after coaling ship.

That day Horace Beasley Brown's Naval education progressed another step. He learned that coaling ship in the tropic port of Rio, with all blowers shut down, was not a job to be laughed at. No, indeed. This was the worst yet. Pulling a hot fire was play beside this. The enthusiastic seamen topside and aboard the collier kept the chutes rattling with the intake, and it was dry and dusty coal. Down in the stifling and Stygian bunkers, the gnomes of the black gang stumbled about in the thick, choking dust and trimmed desperately at the ever growing heaps beneath the chutes.

Over-dressed in shoes, bathing trunks and sweat rag, Fireman Brown did his full share and held up his end of the scoop; but he wished, oh, how he wished, that some kindly power would—just for a moment—move the North Pole south, or the South Pole north—he didn't care which.

And yet Fireman Brown was as happy as he was dirty. After coaling ship came liberty. He was going ashore in Rio.

But after the collier cast off and moved away, a new word came out of the executive office. "No liberty until after washing down." The ship's company did not growl—much. It was to be expected. Couldn't have a ship like a pigsty. Out with the hoses, on with the pumps; out brooms and brushes, soap and soojemooje. Washing down meant also washing up, and to and fro, and every other way washing could be done. A general scrub for ship and man and mascot. It was a desperate cleaning. It took a whole day.

The executive officer inspected his

cleaned ship. He tugged a whisker with one hand and ran the other hand, white-gloved, over the angle irons above his head. His glove was unsoiled. "Hrump!" said he, and retired into his lair.

The ship's writer became important; he rustled papers in his cubbyhole and looked bored while scores of round eyes peered in his window. The masters-at-arms swelled their pouting chests, and their pipes shrilled loudly. Liberty party away at one o'clock! All unrestricted men in the port-watch!

"Oh ——!" said Horace Beasley Brown, and betook his laggard way down to his cleaning station in the engine-room.

He was in the starboard-watch. Another day of wistful watching, seeing the world through a porthole. He wouldn't get ashore until tomorrow.

It was stupid down below this afternoon. Stupid place, stupid work, stupid people, stupid everything. That's how Brown felt about it. His pump was dirty; he didn't care. What was the sense of shining up a chunk of iron that'd be all over grease again in a couple of days? Bah! He'd shipped to see the world—and here he was, in foreign parts, swabbing a dirty floorplate with a piece of dirty waste! Oh, yes, when his time was up he'd ship over—in a pig's eye he would!

Thus Brown's humor. It surprized him to behold how cheerful were his respected elders on the engine. It almost irritated him. Pentlock had finished cleaning down his engine; now he lounged against the oil guard and rubbed his eternal column. Too old a bird was Red ever to be caught openly loafing—not in this man's Navy. He had a lot of column to rub, and a lot of time in which to rub it. He whistled at his task.

Jimmy Hughes actually sang at his. It almost floored Brown to hear Jimmy pipe up in song. It nearly made him forget his own troubles. Singing a song and working away like he had a job he could lose! It made Brown mad. It wasn't right for a fellow to sing when he had as many troubles as Jimmy Hughes had. It wasn't—well, it wasn't right. Jimmy ought to be crying, or swearing, or something like that. Why, he wasn't going ashore at all!

Brown couldn't stand it any longer. He went up on deck and watched the last of the liberty party go over the side. He stared long and hard at the distant beach. He commiserated with Coal-passer "Gawja" Coates on the rank injustice of letting one watch go ashore ahead of the other. He strolled by the log-room to see whether tomorrow's liberty list was posted—although he knew very well it wasn't. He had a long yarn with Romeo, the mess attendant.

When he reached the engine-room again, Red was no longer whistling and Jimmy was no longer singing. Nor were they working; they were standing by the head of the condenser in conversation, and the air about their bemused heads was smoky from the fire of their words. The air of the whole great room was electric with an ill-suppressed excitement. Men craned their necks to observe the two oilers, but they did not intrude upon their conference.

But Brown was different. Brown was a rookie and, in a way, their intimate. He butted in.

"What's the matter?" asked he.

Jimmy was swearing, softly and terribly. It frightened Brown to hear him, and to see him. He swore through his clenched teeth, and his fingers kept opening and closing, as if they were eager to get hold of something—or some one.

"Matter?" echoed Red. "That ——!"

"Oh, I see," said Brown. He knew that Mr. Slade was the matter.

"Well, he's got me, anyhow," said the little oiler, between curses. "Yeh—dead to rights. Yeh, he's got me."

"Oh, why didn't you keep your trap shut, like I told you?" wailed Red.

"Did you hear what he said?" demanded Jimmy very quietly. "No, of course you didn't. He saw to that. Only I heard him. Stuck his fat head right up to me and whispered 'em—called

me every fightin' thing there is. But can I tell that at mast? No, I can't—and he knew I couldn't. D'you know what he was after? I could see it in his eyes. He wanted me to paste him. Yeh, paste him! Then he'd have me—five years, like Johnny Hartman got."

"Well, he's got you for insolence, anyway," commented Red, grimly. "Yeh, insolence, and maybe insubordination. Got you right—half the engine room heard you talk back to him."

"My ——, I had to!" said Jimmy. "It was that or paste him one. I had to talk back."

"Three times up, and two deck courts, in less than three weeks—you ain't got a nigger's chance," said Red.

The unfortunate one shrugged his shoulders.

"Summary, and the limit," he guessed. "Three and thirty for little Jimmy. Well, that's better than a five spot and a bob."

Brown listened, round eyes to the front, but ears open to the muttered words behind him. Brown had learned his place and share in these conferences between his harassed friends. Just now he spied the land, to make sure Froggy Slade would not come upon them again without their foreknowledge.

Slade had slipped up on them, while he, Brown, was loafing around topside. Slipped up on poor Jimmy, singing at his work. Prodded him into an outburst of temper, and now had him right for the serious crime of insolence. It made Brown hot under the collar; he swore, too—under his breath.

"He's after a general," said Hughes. "I saw it in his eyes. This ain't the end. Crimminy, Red, we got to get wise to his game!"

Red sighed.

"I can't figure it out," he said. "He ain't gamblin', he ain't lendin', and there ain't a bottle in his room, so it isn't booze. Tell yuh, I've had that kid, Romeo, go over it with a spy-glass. I don't think he's got any game this voyage—'cept attendin' to you."

Hughes jeered.

"Yah! You don't think for a minute he's makin' this trip just to cook my goose? Nope. I ain't that important. But he found me aboard here, and he just figured he'd better get me before I got him. That's the way of it, I am sure. I've spoiled too many of his dirty games, so he figures he won't take no chances with me this time. Of course, he's payin' me back, too. But he's up to something right now, Red, something right here in Rio. We got to get wise to it. By golly, *you* got to get wise to it; I'm guessing I'll be in the brig after morning mast."

"If a guy could find out what Froggy's doin' ashore," said Red, "maybe he could guess what he's up to. But as near as I can find out he ain't doin' anything particular—just walking around taking in the sights, and buyin' souvenirs. And he's been ashore three times, and he's going again today."

"That ain't like Slade," said Jimmy thoughtfully. "Wasting time and money—not Slade. What'd you say he was buyin'?"

"Souvenirs," said Red. "Just souvenirs, Romeo tells me. Of course, I ain't seen them. But it ain't booze—not a bottle in his room."

"It's saints," Brown flung over his shoulder. "Made out of black wood and all gold-painted, like them the bumboat fella had on deck yesterday. He's got a whole row of 'em on the shelf over his bunk. Romeo was just telling me about 'em, topside. Romeo knows all their names, and he rattles 'em off in spiggoty. One of 'em's a Baptist. Romeo knocked him over when he was making up the room, and Slade threw a fit about it, and kicked him out before ever he got the bed made. Yeh, he was just tellin' me about it, topside. A whole row of saints, that he's been bringin' a couple aboard every time he goes ashore. Saints."

"Uh huh, we heard you first time," said Red. "Saints, you said. Maybe Froggy's got religion."

Hughes shook his head, a puzzled crease in his forehead.

"That's sure a new stunt for Froggy—

collectin' saints. Ain't no money in saints, that I ever heard."

"Maybe these Rio saints are different some way," hazarded Red.

"Well, we can't hang the guy on saints," said the other. "Got to get something more'n that on him, if it's going to do me any good. Wish I could follow him around the beach, just once—might get a line on whatever it is. For it's something, Red, I know it is; it wouldn't be Slade if he wasn't up to his neck in some dirty money-makin' mess."

"I'm on liberty tomorrow if something doesn't happen to me," said Red. He whistled, and looked about for wood; failing to find it in that place of metal, he rapped his knuckles sharply against Fireman Brown's round skull. "I'll go to 'Dago' Frank's," he added. "He'll be goin' there for the beer, like everybody else. Maybe I'll get a line on something besides saints. But, y'darn little fool, don't you go blowin' off any more steam in his face or pull any Johnny Hartman on him."

"Me — I'll say thanks," promised Jimmy. "And I wouldn't paste him if we was on a desert island and no Navy around—or not unless we was. Hope I've blown off my steam, Red. Remember how Johnny Hartman looked when we saw him hangin' around Sands Street? Just a bum. My ——, he was twitchy!"

"Yeh, I remember," said Red. He aimed some softly spoken curses at the condenser head; softly spoken, but so terrible they made Brown's hair curl. "That," said Red, "for the man that made him a twitcher!"

Funny how a word sticks in a fellow's mind. The tall oiler's curses, blistering though they were, left no trace on Brown's mind. But that other word "twitcher" stuck. He didn't try to remember it, didn't know he was remembering it. But it bobbed into his mind and tumbled off his tongue next day, when he thought of what happened as he stood before the money-changer's booth on the landing quay, with foreign soil at last beneath his soles.

He was, at the moment, experiencing the novel and delightful sensation of being a millionaire. He had given a twenty-dollar bill to the swart Semite inside the wicket, and received in exchange a heap of gaudy paper that made his young eyes bulge.

"Them's milreis," explained Red, as he passed his twenty dollars inside. "Yeh, they call it money. But it takes a fistful to buy a smile, so you ain't so rich as you think. Stow it away before some dinge saps you for it."

Brown was stowing it away, in his three small pockets and in his socks, when he beheld Warrant Machinist Slade picking his way through the crowd on the quay. The warrant officer had landed at the officers' landing stage, a hundred yards or so down the street from where the gobs had come ashore; he was too far away for Brown to distinguish features, but there was no mistaking that squat figure.

"Look it, Red, there's Froggy!" exclaimed Brown. "Over there—gettin' into that red-headed flivver!"

The oiler abandoned his share in an acrimonious debate on the international rate of exchange, and stuffed his milreis into his pockets without delaying to count them.

"Yeh, I see him," he assured Brown. "This is luck. Didn't know he was coming off right after the liberty party. Say, we got to try and follow that taxi, kid."

It was at once apparent they would have to do their trailing on Hank's shanks, for not a disengaged conveyance was in sight. The officers who had come ashore with Slade had already commandeered the slender stand of taxis and whirled away uptown. Only the red-topped car remained on the quay, and inside it Mr. Slade could be seen engaged in earnest conversation with a civilian.

"Luck, I say," commented Red, again. "Good for you, kid. Now, if we can only keep in sight of him."

Brown was getting restive. He wondered whether this was Froggy's mysterious game—talking to Brazilian civilians in dilapidated taxicabs. What good

was that going to do Jimmy? Follow the red-topped car? Why, it looked like it was anchored for the day. The negro driver was asleep over his wheel. The liberty party was trailing away uptown. Brown looked after them with longing eyes. He wanted to see the sights.

"Comin' out," said Red.

He jerked Brown behind a tall barrow of fruits displayed for sale. To the fruit merchant's amazement the tall Yankee dropped to his knees on the dirty stones and peered under the cart.

"You watch around the end, kid," called Red. "He wouldn't spot you, if he did see you."

The cab door was open and the civilian —not Froggy, as Brown expected—was alighting. A funny, skinny little man in a straw hat. He stood a moment on the pavement saying a farewell word to the big face that loomed above him; and he said it with waving hands, with shrugging shoulders, with his body, with his feet. He completely captured Brown's attention. Funny little man. And foreign. Talking that way—all over. It made Brown giggle to see him.

The cab door slammed shut and the cab drove off. The funny little man strode swiftly toward them on his way to the broad avenue that swept by the sea-wall. Brown hardly noticed Slade's departure, because the nearer and front view of the little man made him funnier than ever. Why, he walked all over, just as he talked. He had the jerks. A funny guy!

"C'mon!" Pentlock seized Brown's arm and nearly swept him off his feet in the initial sprint. A block away the red-topped cab was turning a corner. "We want to keep 'im in sight—c'mon!" urged Red.

That was the beginning of the marathon. Seeing Rio on the run! Up one narrow street, down another, puffing, blowing, plowing through the astonished and indignant natives who cluttered up the narrow sidewalks, dashing past odd and foreign window displays with never time for a second glance, hustling past cafés where his shipmates sat in the cool shade sipping cool drinks, pounding, pounding the hard, hard cobbles of old Rio with feet already made tender by fire-room heat.

"Oof! I got a bellyache!" complained Brown.

"Can it," was the unsympathetic advice, "and c'mon!"

Ahead was a bray of martial music, and a tangle of traffic at a street corner. The red-topped cab was imprisoned in the mass. Pentlock slackened his gallop to a saunter in keeping with the climate.

"Don't look at him," commanded Red. "If he lamps us we don't want him to think we're followin' him. Look up the street like we was watchin' what's going on."

Small chance of the cab's occupant spying them; his conveyance was entirely surrounded by other vehicles. Smaller chance of Horace Beasley Brown's wasting this moment upon a man he might watch every other day in his life. Brown's gaze was already up the street, from which direction came the music and, behind the strutting band, a cavalcade.

"Gee, it's parade!" panted Brown happily.

This street was the same wide avenue Brown had wished to follow before—their course had been a half circle. It was a beautiful street, the most gorgeous street Brown had ever beheld, wide as a parade ground and parked in the center and on either side. Its buildings were large and imposing, its sidewalks the widest Brown had ever seen, and on them people were more numerous—and alive—than ever Brown had seen them on the sidewalks of Broad street.

"Must be their big boss wop, from the fuss," concluded Pentlock.

"Gosh, they put your eye out, don't they?" commented Brown.

The marching band was green and gold—vivid green and lots of gold; the following cavalry was brave in scarlet and blue, with white-plumed helmets and lances bright with gay pennons; and sandwiched between the escorting troops crawled a gorgeous and much benickeled

automobile. In the car were a slight, swarthy little man who kept his shiny hat upon his head, and a large red-faced man who kept his mostly in his hand, as he bowed graciously and repeatedly to people, trees, pavements, and the backs of the cavalry.

"Yeh—their *presidente*," said Red, his eye upon the quiet little man.

"Gosh, it's our old Fatty," said Brown, his eye upon the prespiring big man.

The great mouth was silent; the orator of the wide open spaces of the North had finished ringing the welkins of the South. His present stately progress was to the waterfront where, before the admiring throng, the tired looking Little Father of the Brazils would fervently embrace the great Applegate paunch and loudly kiss the air on either side of the great Applegate cheeks. All the leaves had been waved off the olive branch, and Mr. Applegate was going home.

"Ain't no doubt about it—we'll sail in the morning," said Red. "Pretty lucky we got this liberty. Now, if Froggy'll only tip his hand—aw ——, there he goes!"

The procession past, the traffic moved from the cross street; the red-topped cab swerved into the far side of the avenue and shot ahead at high speed.

"C'mon—naw, never mind!" cried Red. "He's gone, this time."

"Gone to buy some more saints," guessed Brown.

"Pretty sure I know where he'll stop," said the other. "We'll head for Dago Frank's."

Brown still stared longingly after the gay procession. He'd have liked to follow it. He liked parades. Old Fatty looked awful funny bowing and bowing, with his hat tipping forward every time. Brown said he'd bet Old Fatty's bald spot'd be sunburned by the time he got aboard.

"Wasn't he workin' hard, though?" said Brown. "Arms and face and head, and everything, and him sweatin' like a bull. Reminded me of that guy that was in the car with Froggy, back there—only that guy wasn't big and he wasn't sweatin'. Awful funny guy, though. You notice him particular, Red?"

"Huh? Nope; I was watching Froggy. What was funny about the guy?"

"Oh, I don't know. Kinda the way he talked, maybe—you know, all over. And the way he walked, rubbin' his nose with one hand and then the other, and kinda hitchin' up his shoulders and his knees. And his whiskers. And—oh, I don't know. But he was a funny guy. Reminded me of that feller you and Jimmy was talkin' about what was twitchy. Yeh, that's it, he had the twitches."

"Uh, huh, he had the twitches," absently repeated Red. "Yeh, he had the twitch—oh, my Aunt Jemima's bunion!"

Red stopped short and stared wide-eyed at his trusting companion.

"Twitches," he said. "Twitches—oh, twitches!" To Brown's alarm and astonishment the tall oiler began to caper about the sidewalk. "Oh, my eye and Aunt Sally—yeh, kid, a bullseye!"

"W-what's the matter?" stuttered Brown.

"Twitches," said Red. "Holy twitches!" His voice was excited, his eyes bright with excitement. "Yep, you hit it square."

"Hit what?"

"Both times you hit it," continued Red. "First it's saints; then it's twitches. What more d'ye want, Watson? My ——, and Jimmy and me never thought of it! Oh, baby dear, I love you!"

To Brown's mortification, his companion leaned over him, lifted his hat and kissed him loudly upon his yellow head.

"Hey, you mutt, what's eatin' you?" cried Brown, squirming free.

"Twitches," answered Red. "And saints." He fetched Brown a resounding thump upon the back. "Saints alive!" he cried hilariously.

DAGO FRANK'S, Brown discovered, was a café; and Dago Frank, like Gaul, was divided into three parts, to wit: three blond, blue eyed Germans who

answered readily to the names of Heinie, Carl and Joseph. It was a huge, high-ceilinged, dim room into which Red conducted him through an alley and a side entrance that was partially blocked by trash barrels. After the furnace-like streets, it felt nice and cool inside. A street awning and trees shaded the wide sidewalk before the main entrance to the establishment; it looked even nicer and cooler out there at the little tables set in the shade. But Red said no.

"You wait a minute," said Red and, leaving Brown at the table nearest the side door exit, the tall oiler crossed the room and spied through the latticed front window. After a moment he returned.

"Yep, he's out there," he said to his mystified satellite. "Sittin' by himself and not even drinking his beer. Yeh, he's waitin', that's it, waitin'—for saints, huh? Saints o' Rio, saints alive! I bet a month's pay he is. Oh, boy, won't this make Jimmy dance!"

It made Red himself dance. Hugging his lean body with his long arms, he waltzed slowly and solemnly around the table at which sat the round-eyed Brown. The only other occupant of the interior café, at the moment, was that third of Dago Frank called Carl, who was resting between the demands of the sidewalk patrons. Carl's China blue eyes were as wide open as Brown's as he watched the curious gyrations of this sailor.

Red plumped himself into a chair opposite the rookie.

"Beer!" he called. "*Ein* beer, *zwei* beer—all the beers you got! A litre, a keg, a barrel—bring 'em along, *garçon*, hey, *pronto*, quick! Beer!"

"I get my beer right here," Red then explained to his younger companion. "Yeh, right here at this table. But not you. Nary sip for you, kid—not here."

"Aw, say—" Brown commenced to expostulate.

"Out there in front," continued Red. "Yeh, that's where you drink, with all the nobs. See? It's a matter o' saints—and sinners. See? No, y'don't? Well, you wouldn't, but it doesn't matter. All you got to see is Froggy, and what he does. Y'see that, don't you?

"Well, now, you go on out there—out that side door behind you, and climb over the garbage cans, same way we came in. Yeh. Then don't you go around by the alley—nope, you walk around the block, see, and come down in front of this dump kinda casual, like you never seen it before. Then you sit down out there at one of them little tables and have your beer.

"Got that straight? Mind you sit down where you can kinda look at Froggy without turning your head to do it. He won't notice yuh. No fear. He'd spot me right away, but you're just a no-account rookie. Yeh, you keep a weather eye lifted on him. See? Well, hustle or maybe you'll be too late to see anything. Skip!"

Brown skipped obediently, past the litter in the alley and around the block to the avenue. He didn't in the least understand why Red was sending him on this errand; but there were very few things Brown would not have attempted when commanded by Red in that urgent voice. If Red wanted him to sit out in front and watch Froggy Slade, why, sit out in front and watch him he would. Anyway, it would be nice out there in front. Maybe he'd see something interesting.

He saw Coal-passer Eddie Wilson, of his own section, standing on the corner of the avenue. That was interesting, because Coal-passer Wilson's right eye was puffed closed, and he was thoughtfully spitting blood through a gap in his front teeth; also he was hatless, and his nice white mustering suit appeared to have been dragged in a gutter. Yes, it was very interesting. Eddie also was a recruit, an even rawer rookie than Brown, and from the same State. Eddie was a friend.

"Gosh almighty, what you been doin'?" Brown greeted him.

"Met some fellers off'n that limey gunboat," said Eddie, in an aggrieved voice.

"They wanted to know who won the war."

"Why didn't you tell 'em?" asked Brown.

"Did," said Eddie. "Big feller with a broken nose didn't believe me. I think he was Irish. Say, Brownie, where yuh goin'?"

"Down there," answered Brown, pointing to the shaded tables some fifty yards distant. "To have some beer. C'mon."

"Beer! Gosh—beer," said Eddie. "Umm, I'd sure like to, Brownie." He wriggled uncertainly, torn between desire and fear. "Nope," he decided. "That's an officer sittin' there; looks like our Mr. Slade. Me all mussed up like this, he'd like as not tell me to go aboard; and if he didn't the patrol would. Nope, I gotta keep off'n the big streets. S'long, Brownie."

And Eddie Wilson betook his soiled self down the cross street from which Brown had just emerged.

Brown thought that the warrant machinist was unaware of his presence when he sat down. According to instructions, he chose a table behind the officer and some steps nearer the café door; he was close against the building, under the awning, while Mr. Slade was near the curb. Unobserved, he thought, until Slade swung half-way around in his chair and looked at him. It was just a fleeting, cursory glance, and Slade immediately showed his broad back and triple-rolled neck again, but it gave Brown a cold shiver down his spine. The regard, even momentary, of those greenish, watchful eyes was unpleasant to a man with a guilty conscience.

Brown didn't get the full sense of his mission until he sat down behind Slade; then it rushed upon him with such force it almost floored him. Spying. Gosh! Spying on Froggy Slade! A detective, that's what he was! Red had sent him to find out things—just what things Brown didn't know but, anyhow, things. Brown scowled ferociously and glared at the red, corrugated neck of the enemy. Then, realizing that a detective must dissemble, he switched his scowl and glare to the tables on his right.

Some shipmates were having a party at the farthest group of tables. They kept the three limbs of Dago Frank busy providing the liquid life of the party. But they were deckhands, and no friends of Brown; he scowled and glared, and nearly got an astigmatism trying to cover his quarry at the same time. Spiggoty ladies and gentlemen sat at other tables. Brown scowled at them, and discontent crept into his glare.

Something wrong with this Rio. The spigs looked just like the people at home. More whiskers and dark skins—that was the only difference he'd seen. Foreign parts, huh! Palm trees were all right the first time you saw them, but after that they weren't so much. Only difference between this street and the streets at home was that this street was prettier. Everybody was dressed up on this street. More foreign-like in those alleys Red dragged him through; he'd go back there after while and buy a monkey.

"Peer?" asked Dago Frank called Heinie.

Brown scowled and glared into the pink-and-white face that bent over him. His heart thumped against his ribs; he really felt guilty now. But he said curtly, "Beer," and added, as the waiter turned away, "A big one—yeh, beer!"

It was the first time in his life that Horace Beasley Brown had ordered a drink in broad and open daylight. Ordered a beer, a real beer, much as he might have ordered a sandwich at home! Enough to make a man's heart bump! Despite himself, Brown lost his scowl for a moment; he couldn't help grinning. If Dad could see him now—whoops!—wouldn't there be fireworks!

Back home the rowdy Bohemians who lived across the railroad tracks were supposed to drink beer, which they brewed themselves. But Brown had never drunk it—not real beer. He'd cut his eyeteeth on heavier stuff, in Big Lizzie's upstairs' joint in Norfolk, and in the cellar dive of Bill the Dog Man, outside the

Navy Yard gates. That was a furtive and not very joyous business which a rookie performed as a sort of duty. He owed it to his gobhood. He whispered "Hey, Liz, how about a shot?" or "Say, Bill, got a hair of the old dog?" and he paid his money, took what was offered without question and hoped it wouldn't knock him out of his seat.

But this was different! Sitting in the street, in broad daylight, ordering a beer! Nothing Brown had thus far seen in foreign parts had given the thrill he experienced as he watched the amber goblet approach on Heinie's tray. Yes, this was different!

Better, too. Brown smacked his lips as he set the goblet down. It had only lasted two gulps, he was so hot and thirsty, and it tasted so cool and pleasant. Besides, the deckhands were watching him. They were old-timers; they were used to beer, and he wasn't going to act like a rookie from Iowa who wasn't.

" 'Nother beer," he commanded Heinie. "Yeh, two of 'em. Two—*zwei—dos*—yeh, two—I'm dry."

Red Pentlock wasn't the only guy who could lick 'em up, Brown told himself. Two at a time, yes, three and four. He'd show those deckhands, sitting over there, sipping and sipping, like they were afraid it would bite them. Gosh, this stuff was so mild and nice it wouldn't hurt a fella no more than ice cream sodas! He'd show 'em.

"Three beers," he commanded Heinie. "Yeh, all at once—I'm dry."

Time passed, but Brown was unconscious of its passage. He was busy—"showin' 'em." Busy playing this happily discovered game of ordering multiple beers and consuming them before Heinie's astonished gaze. He had four at one time. He had five at one time. He had the hiccoughs. Then he had a rest, for the deckhands had evidently seen enough; they got up from their chairs and went away.

Brown leaned back in his chair and beamed on Rio. It looked different somehow. The beautiful street was even more beautiful, the sky more blue, the sunlight whiter. A bright place, this Rio. For the first time Brown noticed pretty women passing along the street; he had not seen them before. Gosh, he felt fine! Awash to the ears, and a little heavy about the middle. But he felt fine! Guess he wouldn't have something to write home to Wes Barnes! Nothing like this in Iowa!

A passion to experiment seized upon Brown. The last few beers *had* tasted a little flat—and besides, what were all these other things folks were drinking?

"Hey, Heinie, gimme one o' them!" he stated, pointing to a pony glass filled with a golden liquid, which sat before an aloof and bearded Portuguese, a few tables distant. It was the flash of color that caught Brown's eye. It was a richer color than beer. It was a little drink, and he was no longer thirsty. Merely curious. It looked interesting.

"*Himmel!*" said Heinie.

But he brought the drink. It was interesting; it was a brandy cordial.

"Jiminy whiz!" said Brown, as the ounce of liquid fire slid down his throat.

For a moment he looked worried; it felt like something might explode inside him. But that feeling passed. He felt fine. Gosh, he felt finer!

"Can't go by size in this man's town," he concluded sagely.

He beamed some more upon Rio. Good old Rio! A fresh party of sailors were sitting at the farther tables; he hadn't noticed them before. But they had noticed him; they were smiling at him. So he smiled back. Not shipmates. Limey gobs, off that gunboat. Looked like good fellows. What'd they muss up Eddie about? He forgot. He'd go over and ask them. Buy them a drink. Sailormen ought to drink together, thought brown.

He got to his feet without trouble, but walking was another matter. Amazing! Something was the matter. He felt fine from the middle up, but from the middle down he didn't feel at all. No legs, no feet.

"Thish funny," said Brown.

He seemed to be floating in the air.

He floated one way and knocked over his chair, another way, and upset the table—a grand crash. He floated forward, straight toward the hard sidewalk, and threw out his arms to save himself. He really had no intention of encircling the neck of a passer-by—that was mere chance. But when he crashed, a human form under him softened the shock.

"Whoosh!" said Horace Beasley Brown. "Somethin' wrong about shish!"

Queer. Awfully queer. Things were going around before his eyes—chairs, tables, people, trees. The three parts of Dago Frank were six. Funny, he was sitting on the sidewalk and people were looking at him. Enough to make a fellow self-conscious.

Other men were sitting on the sidewalk beside him. Brown blinked—twice, thrice. Nope. It was only one man. He blinked again, and opened his eyes to their widest. It was the funny guy! That twitchy man who'd been talking to Slade on the waterfront. Yes, it was! There he sat, not an arm's length distant, twitching his nose and his whiskers. Funny! And he was saying things. Brown didn't know what they were, but they sounded funny. Awfully funny. Just like the chattering of a parrot. He just couldn't help laughing at that funny face and those funny sounds.

"'Schuse me," he said to the funny man. "You oughta go on the stage, guy!"

More hot and sibiliant Portuguese. It occurred to Brown that it might not be so funny to the funny man as to himself.

"Didn't mean to," he explained. "Jush fell. Help yup."

He put out a hand to hoist himself up first, and it encountered a paper wrapped package lying on the sidewalk between him and the other man. That is, it had been wrapped, but the fall had ruptured the wrapping. When Brown looked down he saw the contents.

"Gosh — shaints!" he exclaimed. "Shaints alive!" He giggled. It sounded awfully funny to say 'Saints alive!' just like Red. He heard the hasty scraping of a chair behind him, but paid no attention to it. He was looking at the saints. Two of them. Just like Romeo said—all black and gilt. One was broken—the head had come off. Too bad. He'd fix it. He'd pay the guy. He'd buy 'em.

The thoughts didn't come consecutively; they came all at once. "Shorry, fella," he tried to explain to the victim. "Buy 'em—want some shaints. Yeh, my friend wants 'em."

He fumbled with one hand at the package and with the other tried to dig one of his rolls of money out of his trousers pocket—a difficult feat in his sitting position. Saints! Gosh, they were heavy! Romeo didn't say they were so big!

Brown didn't notice that the funny man had suddenly stopped being funny. Stopped twitching, stopped talking. He was watching the awkward fumbling of Brown's hand among the saints with open mouth and staring eyes.

But Brown did take notice of the voice that spoke sharply in his ear. It was the voice of authority, and Brown was broken to the voice of authority these many months past. It was a grating, imperative voice. Moreover, a large hand suddenly gripped his wandering wrist and squeezed it so hard he had to let go of the saint in his hand.

"Stop that!" said the voice. "Get up, you fool!"

"Ugh!" said Brown. At the instant he couldn't say more, for a second large hand gripped him by the neck and hoisted him erect. "Oosh!" he added, as the pressure relaxed. He wobbled a little but he kept his feet. "Wha'smat—"

"You're drunk!" said the voice, and Brown discovered himself looking into the baleful eyes of Froggy Slade.

"Gee!" said Brown. It was like a blast of cold air over his stewing wits. "I—I forgot!" he stuttered.

So he had. Forgotten all about Slade. Sent out there to watch Froggy Slade—and now Froggy was watching him! And

Froggy was mad; his face was red, his eyes were angry, and the great mouth was a thin line across his face. He was shaking Brown, shaking him so hard that Brown's words of explanation rattled and broke between his teeth.

"Sh-sh-shorry!" was all Brown could say.

"Drunk!" repeated Mr. Slade. "Little fool—disgracing your uniform. Get out of here! Out of sight, understand! Or I'll put you under arrest and call the patrol! Out of sight—get!"

A thrust from the large hand that gripped his neck sent Brown forward. Once started, he had to keep going or crash again. He kept going. His one idea was to get beyond the range of Slade's eyes; he could feel the fire from them burning holes in his back.

"Out of sight!" the man said. The open door of the café was like the gaping mouth of a dark cavern; in the friendly gloom of the interior he'd be out of sight. Moreover, he was headed in that direction.

Inside the portal, he was seized by the arm and jerked into a corner. He was hugged, his back was slapped. Red Pentlock's voice hissed jubilantly in his ear:

"Attaboy! You done it, kid, you done it!"

Brown felt a chair edge against his legs and weakly collapsed. He hoped he was out of sight.

"Ish Froggie gone?" he mumbled anxiously.

Red was at the window near-by, peering between the interstices of the drawn lattice. He hunched a shoulder and waggled a reassuring hand.

"Gone?" reiterated the fearful Brown. "Gone?"

"Yeh, goin'," came Red's whisper. "Shut up!"

But a moment later the oiler danced away from his spy post, and tossed his hat at the ceiling with a whoop.

"Got him!" he cried. "Oh, my Aunt Sally—wait till Jimmy hears this!" He whacked Brown upon the shoulder. "And you done it, kid!" he cried.

Then he picked Brown up and sat him in the chair again.

"Well, if you ain't really boiled," he said in a surprized voice.

"Ish he gone?" repeated Brown.

"Yep, and in that same busted down flivver," babbled Red. "Some peddler, I'll say—drivin' up in a taxi; and some buyer—drivin' away in it, with his bundle. With his bundle, kid! Yeh! Didn't take 'em but a jiff, you bet, once you beat it. Froggy didn't like having 'em look at him. Your funny guy didn't, either. Same guy; I remembered him; spotted him as soon as he drove up in that cab. Spotted it, too. And you sittin' there like you didn't see anything!

"Why, kid, I thought you'd gone back on me, sittin' there swillin' all them drinks, and never lookin' at Froggy. I was just going out there and give you a kick in the pants, Slade or no Slade, when this guy comes along with his bundle and you got up and fell on him. Wait till I tell Jimmy; he couldn't of done it better himself! Up and fell on him! Y'ought t'seen his face going down—and the look on Froggy! Say—them *was* saints, wasn't they?"

"Two shaints," solemnly affirmed Brown. "Seen 'em. Felt 'em. Wanna buy 'em—Shlade shay 'outter shight.'"

Red capered afresh.

"Buy 'em!" he cried. "You tried to buy 'em? Oh, wait till I tell Jimmy *that!*" He laughed uproariously. "And me thinkin' right along you was a dumbbell," he added, in a changed and respectful tone of voice. "By ——, kid, you're all right!"

Brown bowed agreement with the other's opinion. He was beginning to feel all right again, now he was sure Froggy was gone. But there was something about those saints he wanted to recall. Oh yes, he remembered.

"Shaint's head come off," he informed Red. "Sh'rolled off. That shaint all holler—fulla cotton, glass—felt 'em—'sh'funny!"

"Huh? What's that?" snapped Red.

Laboriously, Brown repeated his information.

Red sat down opposite him and said very quietly:

"Well, that cinches it. You felt it, y'say? Why, there ain't one speck of guesswork left; now we certainly have got him dead to rights!"

Suddenly Red thumped the table with his fist, and loudly hailed the blond fragment called Joseph.

"Hey, bo, my friend wants a drink. He's earned a drink. Yeh—an' none of your suds, either. Champagne! Bring on the champagne water!"

## VI

AFTERWARD, Horace Beasley Brown often regretted he couldn't remember more of what happened the day he saw Rio. He was inclined to blame Red. If Red hadn't lost him he'd have known all about it, because Red said he remembered everything. But then, Brown himself remembered everything—or very nearly everything—up to the time Red disappeared.

It was the fault of that bubbly cider Red bought, Brown suspected. Champagne water — "like the millionaires drink." It did something to a guy.

At first it did something mighty pleasant. It made a fellow beam. Brown remembered doing that very well; he beamed at Red, at all the Dago Franks, at the walls; and pretty soon he found himself beaming at six representatives of his Britannic Majesty's navy who sat around the table and beamed at him.

They were the same fellows he had seen outside. They came inside, and one of them, a tall man with a broken nose, said—

"Ow, look at the bloomin' swank of the blighters—champine!"

And Red, after a momentary inspection of their numbers and sizes—they were all solid looking men—pacifically bade them welcome.

"Hey, Carl, another bottle o' this fizz!" called Red. "We're goin' to shout our friends."

It was such a jolly party, Brown remembered. He bought champagne, too. But when the Britishers bought, they bought beer.

"Us bloke's 'arven't much left arfter we pay you Yanks yer bloomin' debt," carefully explained the tall one with the flat nose.

"Ought to collect reparations from 'Uns wot calls themselves dagoes," said the chunky fellow with the bad teeth.

But it was a jolly party. Up to a certain point. They sang songs, and Red told them a story. Brown remembered all of that story, or pretty nearly all. For Slade and Jimmy Hughes was its villain and hero.

"Yeh, that guy you seen dustin' off my shipmate here," said Red, "he's off our ship. He's a skunk—but he's pretty near a dead skunk, if you ask me. Funny how things turn out, ain't it? That break of luck me and my friend had today—now that'd almost make a parson out of a man." Red sipped his champagne, and added reflectively, "If he was that sort of man."

"I got a friend aboard ship," he went on, "who's sittin' in the brig this minute on account of that skunk you seen out there. Been my partner for nearly two cruises. Longer than that, really, because we shipped together first time when we was in Chi, and winter coming on. We was sent down to the Norfolk guardo, and there was our skunk, a C. P. O. on the island. Yeh, he was running poker games every pay-day, and skinnin' kid rookies, like we was, out of their pay.

"That's the first time my friend—not this kid, the other one—had any meeting with Froggy Slade—that's the skunk's name. Jimmy, he lost his second month's pay, and he figured it was a cold deck proposition Froggy was running. So next pay-day Jimmy gets a couple of professional gamblers over in Norfolk, and he dresses 'em in uniforms so they'll look like raw rookies, and he introduces them

into Froggy's poker game. Say, the things them fellers did to Froggy! Why, they pretty near took his pants!

"Yeh, it was a fine joke. It went all over the island, and all through the service—how Slade got rooked by a rookie. Everybody had a good laugh, except Slade. He didn't laugh. It cost him money.

"Well, seemed like Fate just would bump my mate Jimmy and this skunk Slade together. I went out to the Asiatic that cruise, but Jimmy stayed with the Atlantic fleet. Slade came to his ship. Still C. P. O.—the war hadn't come to boost him yet. He was runnin' a six-for-five racket on that ship—you know, lending a guy five dollars to go ashore with, and taking back six dollars on pay-day. Lots of money in that graft.

"But Slade wouldn't play it square. He'd meet a guy in a saloon ashore when the guy was drunk and he'd hand him a fiver, and next day when the guy was sober he'd tell him it was a twenty he got. Yeh, he done that—and collected on it. But my mate spoiled it for him. He laid a trap, and the guy who got the five-spot wasn't drunk like he seemed, and there was witnesses under the bar. So that fixed Slade for that ship; he got transferred quick.

"Last cruise Jimmy and me both was in the *West Vermont*. You know that ship—our race-boat crew beat your best in Gib, right after the war. We was proud of that crew—champions of two navies. Yeh, we bet our shirts on that crew every race.

"The skunk come to the *West Vermont*. He had his warrant already and, of course, he didn't mix with the men like he'd done before. But all the same he begun to chum up—on the side, y'see—with the stroke of the race-boat crew. Johnny Hartman was a fine guy; everybody liked Johnny Hartman. I don't know how Slade done it; we'd have banked on Johnny. Hooch, maybe. Or something worse.

"Anyway, he got next to Johnny, and in the big race for the fleet championship, down at Guantanamo, when the odds was five to one for us, and every nickel the ship could raise was in the pot, why, Johnny sells us out. Yeh, catches a crab at the right moment and we lose. Sad accident, y'see?

"But my mate, Jimmy, he didn't see. He knew Froggy Slade, and he lost sleep watchin' him. And a few nights after the race, why Jimmy took the Chief Jimmylegs down to the sail-locker, and there was Slade and Johnny Hartman countin' out money—big money. Oh, nothing could be proved in court, y'see, and anyway that skunk's got a pull like an elephant, but there it was, plain as your face. The ship knew. There was a double transfer, mighty quick, Slade and Hartman, both—or maybe there'd of been a double lynchin'.

"And that ain't the worst that skunk done, either. Afterward he got poor Johnny Hartman drunk, and called him names until Johnny pasted him one. Yeh, Johnny told me himself. And Johnny got five years in the Navy pen for doin' it. Pretty slick, eh? He'd put Johnny away and make a bum outta him, and then if the guy blabbed nobody'd believe him. Yeh, he done that. And Johnny Hartman this minute is a bum with the twitches on Sands Street.

"And that," said Red, "is the kind of skunk that fat feller is, what you saw speakin' mean to my friend here, who ain't so ory-eyed as he looks. This kid, gents, has got brains. Yeh. What he's done today is goin' to put the skids under that skunk, or I'm a blinkin' sodjer, as you fellers say! Yeh, and I bet his pull won't help him, either. We got him, me and this kid. Hey, Brownie?"

Brown was happy, oh, so happy. Red was praising him, bragging him up before company. They were looking at him. Brown cast about in his mind for an appropriate remark. He cast desperately. He had it.

"Pleash to meetcha," he said.

"He ain't so dumb as he acts," said Red hurriedly. "Not half. It's bein' shook up by that skunk what's kind of

got him rattled. I tell you, gents, I wouldn't wish that skunk on the worst ship afloat, no I wouldn't. I hope you ain't got none like him in your navy."

"The British nyvy 'as gentlemen haft," spoke up a red face across the table. "We don't ship skunks in the Henglish nyvy!"

It was said offensively, belligerently. Brown didn't catch all the words, but he understood the tone. He sat up straighter in his chair.

"'Ow about that blighter wot 'as our four points?" promptly spoke up another red face across the table. "'E's not a skunk, ow, no; 'e's only two bloomin' skunks, 'e his!"

"Show me the blarsted nyvy wot 'asn't skunks!" demanded another red face.

Immediately, it seemed, the jolly party had degenerated into a bitter debate over skunks, and who had them, and who hadn't. It looked like the beginning of a good fight. Brown sat up still straighter. He didn't want to miss any of this.

To his astonishment, Red winked at him. A large, portentous wink, just when the discussion was at its loudest, and red fists were waving before red faces. Red winked, and nodded toward the door.

But before the meaning of that wink and nod had sunk through the surrounding moisture into Brown's seat of comprehension, the incipient riot was quelled. The big fellow with the broken nose quelled it. His voice was loudest, his fist was largest.

"'Ere, you blokes, we didn't come 'ere to fight—each other!" he bellowed.

That sobered them instantly, so far as their mutual hostility went. The ensanguined air above their heads cleared away. Only the chunky man with bad teeth muttered on.

"Reparations—blarsted 'Uns!" Brown heard him say.

The big fellow spoke sweetly to Red, and grinned sweetly as he spoke.

"That was a fine yarn, Yank. Now Hi'll spin one."

To his surprize, Brown saw a worried expression flit across the oiler's face. Brown couldn't understand it. He wasn't worried; he was interested. He liked stories.

"'Struth, s'elp me!" affirmed the broken-nosed one. "'Appened just a bit ago, w'en Hi come ashore. Bloke on the quay says to me, says 'e, 'Go down to Botafogo and see something rich,' says 'e, so Hi 'opped the tram and went down, and wot d'ye think Hi sawr? Hi, Yank, wot d'ye think?"

Very widely grinned the narrator; very widely grinned the five red faces on either hand; very widely grinned Oiler Henry Pentlock.

"I think," said Red softly, "we oughtta have another drink."

They had it. But Brown was curious.

"Whadja shee?" he wanted to know.

The big red face turned to Brown; the big voice spoke directly to him, and sweetly, oh, so sweetly:

"W'y, yonker, Hi sawr a bloke down there at Botafogo 'oo was diving something fancy, and swimming habout in the water, and all the bloomin' Botafogo sharks was swimming habout with 'im—big man-eaters they were, hand they never touched that bloke. 'S'elp me! Now, wot d'ye think o' that? Wot d'ye think?"

"I think we oughta have another drink," said Red; and Brown was suddenly conscious that Red was kicking him under the table.

But Brown was curious. He wanted to know. He was so curious even his tongue obeyed him.

"Why didn't they touch him?" he wanted to know.

"Oh, ——!" said Red.

"Because w'y?" crowed the big man delightedly. His gang crowed with him; mouths gaped for the coming laugh. "Because that bloke 'ad words pynted hon 'is bythin' suit, that's w'y. 'The Yanks won the War!' 'e 'ad pynted there. Even the sharks couldn't swallow that!"

"Oh, ——!" Red repeated, quickly this time. And quickly, yet deliberately, he smashed a tall champagne bottle over the head of the humorist. "You would have it," said Red.

Brown was hazy in his mind about what happened next. The trouble was, he thought, that so many things happened all together his memory couldn't sort them out. He remembered chairs flying through the air. And fists. Some one punched him in the eye; and he cut his knuckles on some one's teeth. Then some one yanked him through the door, and he fell among trash barrels and was jerked to his feet; and presently he was loping down the alley by Red's side.

Behind them sounded whoops and howls, and a terrible crash of glass. His hat was gone, and his nice clean mustering suit looked as if it had been rolled in the gutter. His eye was swelling. It made him angry.

"Whash we runnin' for?" he demanded fiercely. "We ain't licked!"

"C'mon, yuh rummy!" Red jerked him along. "Ain't our fight. They're after them three Germans what run Dago Frank's. We was just an excuse to start a row; and I'd of got us out first if you hadn't been so darn curious. C'mon."

It was hard going for Brown, pounding along at Red's side. The oiler was in a fever; he wanted to get back to the ship, he said. Brown protested. He didn't want to go back to the ship. Why, it wasn't night yet, and they had until twelve o'clock. Brown wanted to see the sights. He'd joined the Navy to see the sights. He hadn't spent his money; he had lots of spig paper left, and ten dollars he hadn't changed. Also, Red was walking too fast.

"Gosh, I'm all sloshy," complained Brown. "Le's sit down some're 'n rest."

"C'mon," was all Red replied.

Then they lost each other. Brown couldn't recall much about that misfortune. They were crossing a street, and there were many cars and many people. And all at once he was on the sidewalk, and Red was gone. Red said he turned around in the middle of the street and went back to the curb he started from.

"Might of had wings, you got out of sight so quick," said Red.

But Brown could hardly believe that. He distinctly remembered looking for Red, looking everywhere, in all the cafés, and in all the places with lights in front, and up and down every street he came to. But Red was gone—aboard; and Fireman Brown was seeing Rio.

He must have seen a lot of Rio. But he couldn't remember much of it. He remembered asking a fellow who spoke English where he'd find the Jews, because he wanted to change his ten dollars and feel like a millionaire again, and Red had said that one always changed money with the Jews. The fellow pointed to a large building that looked like a bank, but when Brown got there he found it was a motion picture theater.

The picture was one Brown had seen back home three years before. Life beneath tropic skies; a sloe-eyed brown maiden in a skimpy grass petticoat ran away from a beetle-browed and swart villain, until a handsome young blond American put that villain in his proper place, which was the cemetery. Great stuff, Brown had thought it three years ago—yes, and three days ago. But this afternoon he was scornful; he hadn't seen anything like that! And the bass drum *would* wake him up. Seemed like a fellow just couldn't rest in Rio.

But he was greatly refreshed when he sallied forth again for to see and behold. He remembered meeting "Puffy" Lewis, of his own division, and Puffy said he was hungry. So Brown thought he was hungry, too, and they went into a place and had a race eating ham and eggs. Brown won, but he felt very queer for a while, and somehow he lost Puffy Lewis. They were drinking red wine somewhere, and then—

Then it was black night, and he was standing on a street corner talking with Eddie Wilson. He was laughing at Eddie's black eye, and Eddie was laughing at his, Brown's, black eye, and both were laughing at the funny little marmoset monkey that snuggled in the V of Eddie's jumper with just its tiny face and forepaws visible.

"Yuh go down thataway, Brownie, 'n'

then yuh go down thataway," directed Eddie, "'n' then yuh go up the alley, 'n' there's a whole store full of monkeys. Why, you can get a monk for fifty cents real money. But these little fellers come higher. I paid two bucks for this'n."

Brown guessed he missed the right alley, for he never did find the store full of monkeys. He remembered how he searched for it. He walked and walked, up alleys and down alleys, and never a monkey did he see. And he wanted a monkey; more than anything else he wanted a monkey—like Eddie's. He asked for the monkey store every time he went into a café to get refreshment, but he seemed to have strayed into a district of the city where English was not spoken and into which his shipmates had not strayed. The people he met could provide drinks, but not monkeys.

He did buy a parrot from a pink-eyed negro. But the bird wasn't sociable. It bit a chunk out of his ear and flew away when he let go the string. Anyway, he wanted a monkey.

Music drew him down a dark side street and on to a bright square where a street carnival was in full progress. "The Great American Carnival and Amusement Company," he read on the banner that spanned the short lane of booths. The merry-go-round brayed endlessly, "It Ain't Gonna Rain No More"; a barker barked his ballyhoo before a pit-show, but his voice was alien.

Brown was delighted. This was a breath from home. He rode the merry-go-round as a patriotic duty, rode it until he was too dizzy to ride it any longer. Every time he passed the white-faced man who ran the machinery he called out, "Hello, fella!" It was good to see another American. But going round and round like this mixed afresh all the liquids and solids he had put into himself and made him feel very queer. He wanted to see the rest of this show, but decided to rest awhile first. So he went into a café on a corner opposite the carnival and sat down.

He couldn't remember much about that café. When Red wanted to know about it, he could only say it was a sort of shanty café run by a fat woman with a black mustache. But it was in there he found Rose Lily and the Professor.

He didn't know how he met the Professor, whether the fellow came in after he did or whether he found him in there. But he and the Professor sat at the single table beneath the single electric light and drank together, and were very good friends. The Professor was a white man, another American; he was Professor Maloney, of Sandusky, Ohio, and he belonged to the carnival company. Brown remembered that. And that the Professor was down in his luck and sad—and very thirsty.

Every time he emptied his measure the Professor said—

"Us Amuricans has got to stick together!"

"Sure," said Brown courteously, and ordered another drink. The poor Professor, it seemed, was temporarily broke.

The Professor confided his troubles, which were many and complicated, because, as he said, "Us Amuricans has got to stick together." He had had a dirty deal, that's what he'd had, and they'd got him down here in a strange land where he had to take what they give him, and they ditched his grift on him. Yes, ditched it! And he known these twenty years, from the Coast to Maine, as the best snake man that ever went into a pit! They'd gone and made a Jojo out of him, Professor Maloney!

The Professor was very bitter and said violent things. He didn't want to be a Jojo, Brown gathered. It was a great come-down for Professor Maloney. But what could he do about it? he demanded. Hey, young feller, what could a man do?

Brown thought and thought—and bought another drink.

"Mind you, I'm a fair-minded man," said the Professor. "Ain't nobody can say Bill Maloney ain't fair-minded. I admit the snake pit wasn't doin' no business; in fact, was losing money. Yes, sir, I admit that fact, young feller. Likewise,

I admit the Jojo pit was makin' money.

"These here natives down here ain't civilized, and that's a fact, young feller. You take my word for it. Why they wouldn't pay a lousy reis to see the swellest snake-eater what ever stepped into a pit. That's a fact. And they fight to look at the dog-faced man. Give 'em a chance to behold the greatest snake-eater in the world—that's me, young feller, Professor Bill Maloney—and they starve him out. Yes, sir, starve him out.

"Last Jojo we had was a Jamaica nigger we got in Santos, and he was a good Jojo, I'll say that for him. There was the makin's of an artist in that boy. And he up and runs off with a yeller gal he got in this town, and set up in the laundry business. Just yesterday, that was. And this morning the Big Boss, he says to me, he says, 'Maloney, your grift is ditched!' Just like that, he says it, without givin' me a chance. 'You'll be Jojo,' he says, 'or you'll be nothin'!' "

The Professor groaned in anguish of spirit, and looked reproachfully at his empty glass. Even when it was filled, he still groaned.

"It ain't that I mind so much bein' a Jojo," he informed Brown. "It ain't that. If I do say it myself, young feller, I bet there won't be a better dog-faced man in the business than Bill Maloney. It's the principle of the thing—ditching a guy's grift just because these here natives ain't civilized enough to appreciate good, clean, civilized entertainment! He had ought to have give me a conference!"

The Professor cried a little. So did Brown. Somehow, it seemed terrible—to lose one's grift and become a Jojo!

"Shtoo bad!" sobbed Brown. "Know jush how you feel, mister. Wanna monkey; can't fin' 'em."

"Sent my stock to the dealer this very day," cried Professor Maloney. "Sold me out, the dirty dog!" He brooded, and dropped large tears into his glass; then he drank, and brightened, considerably. "But they didn't get Rose Lily," he said. "I held Rose Lily out. No dealer ain't goin' to get my Rose Lily." But his exultation was momentary. He wept afresh. His Rose Lily, his poor Rose Lily! "She can't travel in no Jojo grift," he mourned. "If I could only leave her in some kind Christian home — but these heathens down here, why, they'd *eat* her!"

"Know jush how you feel," repeated Brown. "Wanna monk; can't fin' 'em."

"Monk!" echoed the Professor scornfully. "Young feller, take my advice and leave monks in the trees where they belong. Dirty, treacherous brutes, all I ever seen, and that's plenty. But a snake, now—there's a pet a man can be proud of, and love. Yes, sir, love! It coils around your heart, it squeezes your heart strings, it—oh, my poor Rose Lily, best snake I ever trained; yes, sir, sweetest tempered and handsomest reptile ever born, and now I got to ditch her! Got to ditch her!"

"Shee whiz! You talkin' 'bout a sh-shnake?" exclaimed Brown. "I—I shought's your wife."

"Named for her," explained the Professor. "Named for my poor, dear, sainted wife what skipped out with a bandsman in Toledo, in 1912, and me never settin' eye on hide or hair of her again. And let me tell you, young feller, you heed my words, what knows—why, wives is all right, but don't you ever go passing up a nice trained snake for no wife. No, sir. There's advantages to loving a snake that ain't commonly appreciated. It don't eat much, and it rustles its own grub, give it a chance; it don't want no clothes; and it don't talk back—no, sir, it don't talk back.

"When you want it, you whistle the right way, and it comes. Ain't half the trouble of keepin' a cat, which is always yowlin' for something, and it's twice as affectionate and faithful as a dog. Like my Rose Lily. And you sitting there wanting a monk!"

"Sh-shcuse me," said Brown.

He felt so ashamed of himself, with the Professor's scornful words ringing in his ears. How had he ever come to desire a monkey, anyway? What good was a dirty, treacherous monkey that ought to

be in the trees? Nice snake—that wouldn't talk back—

"How mush a trained shnake?" he wanted to know.

"How much you got?" was the Professor's prompt retort.

"Ain't got mush spig monish," said Brown, after a moment of intense concentration. "Got ten dollars real monish. Got nice Chrishun home on my ship."

"Money is not everything," stated the Professor grandly. "It's the kind of home my Rose Lily'll get I'm thinkin' on. Kind hands, lovin' hearts—that's everything, young feller. I couldn't bear to give Rose Lily into the clutches of these here dagoes in these parts. They wouldn't appreciate her. She's got feelin's, eddicated feelin's. I learned that snake myself, everything she knows. Yes, sir, everything. Why she's got tricks, young feller, as would make you fall out of your chair!"

"Szhat sho?" commented Brown, a note of alarm in his voice. "Don' wanna fall outta my chair."

"I'll accept your ten dollars," hurriedly continued Professor Maloney, "because you insist upon it. Not as payment for Rose Lily. No, sir! Think Bill Maloney would sell his best friend for money? It ain't the money that gets you Rose Lily, young feller. It's the principle of the thing. It's providin' for Rose Lily's future, because, as I said before, a Jojo grift ain't no place for a nice snake like Rose Lily. You show me your ten dollars, young feller, and I'll think about it."

Brown showed his ten dollars. But he didn't surrender it. Oh, no He was wise; he was from Missouri.

"Sh-show me your Roshie," was his ultimatum.

"Look!" said Professor Maloney. "You whistle like this—remember, like this!"

He whistled. A curious whistle. Not loud. A whistle that had a moist gurgle in it, and a soft hiss.

"Look!" said the Professor.

Brown looked. Naturally, he looked at the floor. Then he looked at the ceiling. Last, he looked at the Professor.

The latter wore no coat, which the climate of Rio permitted, if the social convention did not. Nor did he wear a collar. His shirt gaped open at the throat and his sleeves were rolled above his elbows.

Out of the V at his neck flowed a living column of glistening black and white, an endless column, it appeared to Brown's fascinated game. It flowed around Professor Maloney's neck, and the high, narrow end of the column, pointed like the prow of a boat, came to rest against his cheek. A little red forked tongue probed the air inquisitively and two tiny points of jet stared unwinkingly down at Brown.

"Shee whiz!" said Brown.

"Ain't she a beaut?" declaimed the Professor. "None o' your venomous dago snakes, Rose Lily ain't. No, sir. She's a civilized snake, from God's country, she is. Texas king-snake; and she's slept with me, young feller, ever since she wasn't much longer than a minute, and she three feet one inch, tip to tip, right now. And tricks! Knock you out of your chair, young feller. I learned her, learned her everything she knows, and she knows a lot. Look!"

He thrust his half bared arm across the table and rested his fingertips against Brown's chest. He whistled again that soft, gurgly, hissing whistle. Immediately the column commenced to flow down the extended arm. It flowed swiftly, so swiftly Brown saw it as a wave of color; it flowed around and around the bared forearm, and became a barred bracelet extending from elbow to wrist; six inches of slender neck arose in the air, and the little forked tongue waggled three inches from Brown's face.

"Gosh shmighty!" exclaimed Brown, and fell out of his chair.

"What'd I tell you?" exulted the Professor.

Brown arose, with some difficulty, and moved his chair a little away from the table.

"Don't know 'bout thish deal," said he. "I ain't used t' shnakes."

"Nonsense!" said the other. "Bargain's a bargain, and that's the principle o' the thing, young feller. Why, this lil' baby's a whole grift in herself; you could charge admission to see her. You ain't seen the half of her cute tricks. Look!"

Professor Maloney waved his arm violently about his head, he rubbed it against his body, he thumped the table with his fist—and the barred bracelet on his arm was without motion.

"She didn't budge," cried the Professor. "You seen it. Harder I shook, harder I rubbed, harder she stuck. That's Rose Lily for you! Learned her that myself. Learned her to love the feel o' human flesh. She's 'fectionate, Rose Lily is. Once she gets set on a bare skin, she won't let go no matter how hard shake an' pull. Why, you can get drunk as you like and you won't lose Rose Lily. That's brains for you! That's bein' faithful, ain't it? Not like a woman, no, sir. Rose Lily'll stick. You got to whistle before she'll let go."

"Don'—don't she ever bite yuh?" was Brown's cautious query.

"Bite!" The Professor's scorn was withering. "Ain't I said she was civilized? This snake's man-broke. Loves 'em. Learned her to myself. Raised her from a baby and she never bit me. No, sir, young feller, you needn't be afraid of that, and if I do say it as shouldn't, you'll find Rose Lily's a credit to her trainer. Yes, sir, a credit."

"I s-shink sho, too," agreed Brown. "Shtoo bad. Shink I wanna monk."

## VII

NOW THAT was a firm decision in Brown's mind. His recollection was very clear that he firmly decided he did not want Rose Lily's clinging affections. He'd take a monkey. Any kind of monkey. But not Rose Lily.

Yes, he knew Rose Lily was a beaut. He admitted she was quite the prettiest snake he'd ever seen, and the best educated and behaved snake, too. Yes, he liked Rose Lily—but, if the Professor would see, it was just that he wasn't used to snakes. He'd better be satisfied with a monkey.

"You ain't used to monkeys either, or you wouldn't talk like that," he remembered the Professor retorted.

But that retort didn't change his decision. No, he didn't want Rose Lily.

Yet, in the end, he got Rose Lily.

Thinking it over, Brown guessed it was the whistle that changed his mind, helped, perhaps, by the Professor's hypnotic insistence. Brown knew he'd been proud of the whistle. After a couple of attempts and a few drinks he got it perfectly. His whistle was a very echo of the Professor's own—and Rose Lily came to him so trustingly.

"She loves you, boy!" the Professor said, with deep emotion. "You ain't agoin' to throw her down, are you?"

But even putting it on that basis failed to change Brown's mind completely. Of course, it counted. He remembered crying some more with the Professor, while Rose Lily linked their wrists together; he remembered that it was at that moment he presented the ten dollars to the poor fellow, because all Americans ought to stick together. But not then did he accept Rose Lily.

It was later, after they had sung some old home songs together, that the Professor remarked:

"You'll have many a good laugh, young feller, on account o' Rose Lily. Think how'll you surprize them fellers on that ship of yours. A whistle—and Rose Lily'll pop out at 'em. Yes, you'll have many a good laugh."

It was that that did it. The thought of Rose Lily popping out when he whistled, to the consternation of whatever shipmates were near-by. That would be gorgeous, thought Brown. He'd have many a laugh.

Besides, by this time he was more used to the feel of Rose Lily—or potations had rendered his skin insensitive to the feel of her. He got so he could stand her on his bare arm; but not around his bare middle, where the Professor said he commonly

wore her. But he got so he didn't notice the weight or feel of her on his arm.

When, later that night, the ship's patrol intercepted Fireman Brown's eccentric but steady march into the interior of Brazil, and correctly headed him for tidewater, Rose Lily was an immobile and unnoticeable burden beneath the loose sleeve of his blouse. In Brown's mind was a fixed purpose to have many a laugh.

But, after reflection, he thought he'd better not whistle for the patrol. They had clubs, and while they were shipmates, they weren't exactly friends, and a fellow never knew how those deckhands would take a joke. He'd save his whistle until he got down to the waterfront and among his own fellows of the black gang. Then he'd have many a laugh.

At the landing stage, he decided he'd better save his laughs for later. Because, there before his very eyes, the cruel hand of authority was forcibly divorcing indignant and protesting sailors from their new loves and true.

"No livestock to go aboard!" was the word, and keen and sober eyes saw that the word was obeyed. Small monkeys and large monkeys, ring-tailed monkeys and howler monkeys, monkeys with whiskers and monkeys without—all were sent to join the parrots, parakeets and macaws, dogs, cats and the baby donkey, and other assorted and unnamable Brazilian fauna, who squawked, screeched, howled and chattered in a shed on the quay which had been sequestered as a mascot jail.

But Rose Lily did not join the orphans. Rose Lily stayed where she was, coiled flat around Horace Beasley Brown's bare arm; and even the gaze of "Gimlet-Eye" Jones, which had detected the baby marmoset beneath the hat of "Flop" Reilly, failed to pierce the sleeve of Brown's jumper. Brown congratulated himself. Not so slow, he'd say, pickin' out a mascot that got by Ensign Jones, and it didn't need no clothes or nothin', and it never talked back! Not so slow. But he'd save his laughs until he got aboard.

Going off to the ship in the crowded and disorderly liberty boat, he decided just how he'd acquire the first of those many laughs. It would be on Red, on ol' Red, darn him! Serve Red right for losing him. When he got aboard he'd go right to Red's hammock and wake him up; and then he'd whistle!

But this fine scheme fell flat, because Red was up and actually waiting for him at the log desk where the chief master-at-arms was checking in the liberty party.

"Drunk and dirty," commented the Jimmylegs, running his cold and sophisticated eye over Fireman Brown's form. "No hat *and* a black eye. I ought to, but I won't. There's worse one's'll have to be hoisted aboard. Take him away, Pentlock, and keep him out of sight. They're throwin' a party in the ward-room, y'know."

"Well, y' did stray home, didn't yuh?" demanded Red, when he had his salvage secure in the comparative seclusion of the engineers' wash-room, down on the berth deck. "Kid, I oughtta spank yuh—givin' your Uncle Henry a twenty-three like that, and gettin' swacked up like you are. Phew! You're ripe!"

"Red, sh-sh-shand right there!" said Brown. "Now, don' sha move—lil' sh'prize."

"You c'mon t'bed," said Red.

"Shee Rosh Lily," continued Brown. "Lil' sh'prize."

"Been steppin' out with them spig girls, have yuh?" said Red severely. "Might of known that was it! What's the matter with that arm?"

"Don' sha move," reiterated Brown. "Lil' whish-whishle. Pop!"

Brown puckered his lips. He blew. He wet his lips, and blew again. And no whistle came. He'd forgotten how to whistle. He blew himself empty, and no whistle came.

"Sh-shee whiz!" said Brown.

"Swung your hammock on the deck," said Red, "so y'won't roll out. C'mon."

"Shtoo bad!" mourned Brown. "Lil' sh'prize—pop!" He fumbled at his wrist band and drew up his sleeve. "Shee?"

"Great Scott!" cried Red, with a sudden bound backward.

Rose Lily stuck out her tongue. But Rose Lily did not move. From wrist to elbow, Brown's arm was encircled by tight coils of glistening black and white.

"Shee?" said Brown. He waved his arm about his head, he pounded his fist against the wall of a shower bath. Rose Lily stuck.

"My God, what is it?" asked Red. "A real snake?"

"Besh lil' ol' shnake ever shee," affirmed Brown. "Shivilize 'n' twenty years a Jojo, 'n' don' talk back or nothin'. A-ain't shee a beau-beau-brute, Red?"

"Won't it bite?" queried Red, cautiously coming nearer.

"Raish her from baby," solemnly avowed Brown. "Never bit me. Shee's—shee's got es-eggs-education, Rosh Lily has. Loves the 'uman flesh. Won't leggo. Shee? Won' leggo wishout whistle."

He waved his arm again, and Rose Lily didn't let go.

"Lil' sh'prize," continued Brown. "Pop! But can't whishle 'n' s'won' leggo."

Suddenly an anxious expression crept into Fireman Brown's face, and overlaid the complacent air of proprietorship. He waved again, and then tried to rub Rose Lily off on the edge of the shower bath. But Rose Lily wouldn't rub off; Rose Lily tightened her coils.

"Red! Shee whiz!" cried Brown. "She won' come off wishout whishle!"

"Don't come near me!" cried Red. "That thing's alive!"

But in the end the oiler did help Brown. Pentlock would go a long way to help a shipmate, especially a shipmate who had rendered the service Brown had that day rendered. Pentlock would handle a rat for a shipmate's sake, and however little he relished the task, he now handled a snake. It was a task, too. Rose Lily didn't want to be unwound; she raised welts, she hugged so hard. And the fool rookie wouldn't keep still. In the end, Brown's arm was free, and Rose Lily moved sluggishly on the floor. Brown put his foot on her so she wouldn't run away.

"I'll duck down to the fire-room and get a scoop shovel," said Red. "You step on him till I get back; we'll just give your Rose Lily a drink overside. Of all the fool stunts—" Red's voice trailed away into a profane mumble as he disappeared down a near-by boiler ladder.

Brown's voice was audible in a mumble, too, had any one been there to hear. Perhaps Rose Lily heard; she lifted her head above Brown's shoe and regarded him reproachfully. Brown mumbled to her.

It hadn't turned out as he'd planned, at all. His many laughs, even his one laugh! All on account of that "whishle." How Red was going to shovel Rose Lily overboard.

No, he wasn't! Not much, he wasn't. Brown would show 'em. He'd hide Rose Lily. He'd hide her in his ditty box, and tomorrow he'd be able to whistle and he'd have many laughs. That was it. Fine idea. He'd do it before Red got back!

He tried to. Afterward, Red and Jimmy, and all the ship's company who were in on it, were inclined to give him credit for having planned the entire blow-up. Hadn't he brought the snake aboard? But down in his heart Brown knew he hadn't; he remembered very clearly that all he planned was to hide Rose Lily in his ditty box and have many laughs next day. But Brown was much too modest to protest a general opinion.

He went out of the wash-room and aft along the bag alley. This excitement was wearing him out; he was very tired and sleepy, of a sudden, and his feet just would step on each other, but he made it with the assistance of the piperail to which the bags were tied. In his other hand dangled a limp yard of snake.

Brown's ditty box was in the rack above his clothes-bag near the after end of the alley. A few feet distant, the passage terminated in an open door, which let upon another, wider passage. This latter passage was the one the warrant officers' berths opened upon; and farther aft still, commissioned officers' rooms let upon it,

even the sacred ward-room where—though Brown did not know it—the Honorable Ambrose Kansas Applegate was at the very moment concluding the three-hour speech which had informed the senior officers of the U. S. S. *Apache*, and the guest officers from H. M. S. *Belvedere*, just what wonders the Applegate voice had accomplished for the honor and glory of mankind and the grand old U. S. A.

On this hot night all bisecting doors in this long artery stood open; even the ward-room door, that the Kansas zephyrs might readily cool and dissipate into the remote regions of the ship.

But Brown was not thinking of doors, or zephyrs. It was such an effort to get down his ditty box. It took both hands, and Rose Lily was in the way. So he put her down and stepped on her, while he achieved the feat desired.

Perhaps he stepped too hard; perhaps he didn't step on her at all. He could never be sure—and his feet were behaving queerly. Anyway, when he got the box down and opened, and reached for Rose Lily, Rose Lily wasn't there. A wild glance revealed her nether half just flowing around the door into the warrant officers' passage. Brown grabbed wildly —and skinned his nose upon the deck.

It was Red who hauled him erect and braced him in the doorway. An excited Red, with a shovel in his hand.

"Where is it? Where'd yuh put it?" demanded Red. "Yuh little rummy!"

"Ish gone," said Brown. "In there!"

"Oh, my gosh!" said Red.

They peered. It took them a moment to locate Rose Lily. Then they spied her. She was against a closed door; her head raised an inch or so above the deck with an air of inquiry. The door she inspected was the only one of the six that opened upon the compartment which was closed. Even Brown recognized it as Warrant Machinist Slade's door.

Brown recognized something else—even as Rose Lily very evidently recognized it. The whistle! The tricky, difficult whistle! It came out through the ventilator opening above the closed door in soft and regular cadence. A gentle snore was mixed in with it; but the whistle was very plain in the medley, the same moist, gurgly whistle that was partly a hiss, which Professor Maloney had taught to Brown.

Brown was paralyzed; but not too paralyzed for one thought. His laugh! He was going to have his laugh.

"Sh'prize," he whispered to Red. "Thash right whishle. Shee 'er go?"

Red stiffened and drew in a sharp breath. He had a thought, too. Almost the same thought Brown had, but without the laugh.

"My Aunt Kate, if it does!" breathed Red. "Oh, if it only does!"

It very promptly did. A closed door could not daunt Rose Lily while that dear, familiar call trembled on the air. There was a possible entrance, and she found it with dispatch. Red had no time to offer assistance. Rose Lily forsook the deck before the door, and coiled up stanchion to an I-beam overhead, flowed along the beam, and across the narrow gap which separated the beam from the open ventilator. Plenty of room in that hole for a dozen snakes. Rose Lily disappeared like a flash of light.

For a moment, even Brown was shocked sober and speechless. Red was panting.

Behind the closed door something was happening to the gentle, soothing snore. The whistle went out of it, then the snore went out of it, and just the gurgle was left. It ended in a gasp. A loud gasp.

"And he's raw," breathed Red. "He's raw!"

The gasp became a stuttering and horror-laden roar, a large body threshed, bumped, a heavy weight crashed open the door, and Francis Xavier Slade rolled forth—raw. Rolled, is literally correct. Head down, knees up, he rolled, like some monstrous, misproportioned white frog; he rolled clear across the passage and crashed against the bulkhead. Then he stood on his head and clawed his leg.

Rose Lily was coiled about his naked limb.

Yes, Brown had his chance to laugh.

But somehow he didn't laugh. It should have made him laugh; the sight of a fat, middle-aged, naked warrant officer hopping about on his head should make any one laugh. But it was horrible! It scared Brown. That frantic, horrified bellow with which Slade accompanied his calisthenics almost made Brown yell.

It did make other people yell. Cries came from all directions, and heads thrust out of every other door in the passage, and in the passage beyond, startled, tousled heads. Mr. Slade suddenly came right side up and commenced a vigorous, one-legged dance toward the wardroom.

Just what happened in that holy of holies was afterward a matter for debate in the various divisions. Certainly, Slade danced right in among them, howling like a banshee, and tearing Rose Lily away from one limb only to have her promptly transfer her affectionate coils to another. Certainly that happened.

Romeo, the mess attendant, who was present in professional capacity, stoutly maintained that Mr. Slade kicked Mr. Applegate in the stomach, and shut him up. Certainly Mr. Applegate did shut up—and what treatment less drastic could have achieved that effect? Romeo also said that the visiting executive officer from H. M. S. *Belvedere* placed his monocle in his eye and said coolly, "My word!" and in a tone to indicate that such goings on didn't occur on his ship; and the resident executive officer, pulling his whiskers, said in an exasperated voice, "This is outrageous!"

But Brown was not a witness to anything that transpired beyond the limits of the warrant officers' passage. And, indeed, Brown very nearly forgot both Slade and Rose Lily, even while the combat raged farther aft. There was a war nearer by that engaged his attention.

Red had run into Slade's room, and things were happening in there. A banging and a throwing about. Brown would have approached nearer, even joined his friend, but his legs said no. He couldn't move; he couldn't stand up, except by holding onto the edge of the door.

Red was throwing Mr. Slade's saints out through the door. Pulling their heads off, and chucking them against the bulkhead. The deck was littered with decapitated saints, and little bottles, and broken glass, and white powder. Red was busting up Froggy's saints!

"Whoosh!" cheered Brown. "Gimmell, Red—whoosh!"

Then his legs gave way entirely and he sat down on the deck.

Brown didn't see the procession coming forward from the wardroom—the shrinking, flabby, still gibbering victim and his escort. An imposing escort—the Old Doctor and the Young Doctor, each with a firm grip on one of Slade's arms, the chief engineer stalking ahead, the navigating officer stalking behind, and lastly—but by no means leastly—the First Luff himself, come to see what this outrage was about. Trailing behind were all the warrants who had chased Slade aft.

"What this going on here?" barked the chief engineer, as he dodged the last saint to come hurtling through Slade's door. The procession came to a halt.

"Snakes, sir," said Red promptly. "Snakes in this room, sir—accordin' to Mr. Slade, sir. Thought they might be in these here saints he was spillin' about, sir. Hollow, they are, but they ain't snakes in 'em—just powders. Like this, sir."

He picked up one of the little bottles from the deck and handed it, not to the chief engineer, but to the Old Doctor.

"Eh? What's this?" said the latter. He peered near-sightedly at the little glass cylinder in his palm. "My goodness gracious!" he exclaimed.

He released Slade's arm and picked up another little bottle from the deck, picked up a pinch of spilled powder, picked up a headless saint and shook bottles out of it.

"What is this all about," snapped the first lieutenant. "Who's this man? What—"

"Narcotics!" snapped back the Old Doctor. "Enough to poison a fleet!"

The young doctor darted into the room, following the trail of broken saints. In a

moment he came out with a figure in each hand; Red hadn't got to them yet, they were loaded.

"Hump!" said the chief engineer to the cringing culprit. "I knew we'd get you some day."

Slade was silent. What use to talk, to protest, to deny?

Red sidled toward the door to the bag alley. His work was done, he thought. But the sharp eyes of the Chief spied his progress.

"Just a minute—you!" he arrested Red. "What were you doing down here? What do you know about this?"

"Nothing, sir," vowed Red. "Just—just was in the bag alley, and heard the row, and—"

"Hump!" said the Chief. "Let's see, you're a friend of that boy, Hughes, aren't you?"

"Yes, sir," admitted Red.

"Umm—and you just happened to be in the bag alley—"

"But there *was* a reptile. We saw it," came the first lieutenant's voice.

Red fiddled uneasily. Sharp man, this chief!

The Chief suddenly stepped to the bag alley entrance and glanced in—and down.

"Who is this?" he exclaimed.

"This" was Brown. Sound asleep, with his back against the bags, and whistling as he slept. It was a soft, gurgly whistle, with a little hiss in it.

"That—that's a fella in my section," said Red hurriedly. "Nice kid, sir—just a rookie. Been ashore."

"Yes, so I observe," remarked the Chief. He contemplated Brown—the black eye, the soiled uniform, and the bared — and ornamented — arm. Rose Lily was home again. "Well, for heaven's sake!" said the Chief.

Red stooped quickly and drew down Brown's sleeve, thus drawing a curtain over the evidence.

"He's a good kid, sir," he said desperately. "He never was in a port like this before, sir, and we was goin' to throw it overboard, when it got away."

"So opportunely," finished the Chief dryly. "Well, stow your friend away, Pentlock, and get rid of that—er—decoration on his arm, before I am compelled to—er—see him. Ummn—then, young man, you come to my room. I think we need a few words with you!"

## VIII

IT WAS very pleasant in the shade of the turret on the forecastle. A cooling breeze, born of the ship's progress, ruffled restfully over recumbent forms. Brown liked to lie there, between his chosen friends, and gaze up at the sky. It was so restful—after Rio.

"Got the makin's, Jimmy?" he inquired lazily of the friend on his left hand.

"Sure thing; here y'are, Brownie," was the instant response from the little oiler; and, "I got some tailor mades; want one o' them, Brownie?" from Red Pentlock on his other side.

"Brownie!" And just two days ago he was "Bub" and "Kid," and "You —— rookie!" Now he was Brownie, he had a real name and a standing on this man's ship; they pressed smokes on him!

Never was such a pleasant day in Horace Beasley Brown's recollection. What if this starboard eye was the color of coffee? What if his tongue still resembled a piece of dried leather in his mouth? He was no longer Kid. He was Brownie. He'd accomplished something big and worth while in foreign parts—however unknowingly—and passed forever from the probationary ranks into the free and unofficial brotherhood of gobs tried and true. He had exhibited daring, great shrewdness and undaunted courage in succoring a distressed shipmate and chum—and now he was Brownie.

It was his accolade. Never did knightly aspirant of olden time receive the coveted salutation with greater thrill or keener pleasure—or, it must be added, with vaster surprize.

To wake up in the morning with a head as big as the turret against which he now leaned, remembering nothing about going to bed, and to discover oneself famous—

well, that was an experience. Brown hadn't got over it yet. At first he was dumb with surprize; then he was dumb with gratification. Now, short days later, he was quite convinced he really had exhibited daring, shrewdness and undaunted courage in discomfiting a villain and rescuing a good fellow from the clutches of the courts martial. Anyway, everybody —even Red—said he had. And wasn't Rose Lily there to prove it?

Brown would have liked to wear Rose Lily before all the admiring world, instead of showing her for brief seconds to the initiated and trustworthy few. Now he was getting used to Rose Lily, he'd like to enjoy a few of those many laughs that haunted his confused memory. But Red said no, and Jimmy backed Red up. Rose Lily must be a private pet.

"I ought to have dumped the thing," said Red. "Yeh, that's what the Chief meant—dump it, give it a swim, send it after Froggy. But, gosh, I didn't have the heart—not after what Rose Lily done for us, and Brownie so fond of it and everything. So I swiped that piece of screen outta the storeroom and fixed up that box back of the condenser. Won't anybody look back there, and they wouldn't see anything if they did, unless they crawled right up on top of it. Rose Lily's all right until we get to Norfolk, and then we can hunt up some nice home ashore for her. She sure deserves it, after what she done for us."

"The department had ought to pension Rose Lily," was Jimmy's opinion. "I'll do it myself, if they don't. Why, I can't hardly believe it yet—us homeward bound, and me with a clear record. The Chief's a brick, I'll tell the world. And Brownie, you ol' souse, I'm gonna show you the best time you ever seen soon's we hit Church Street again!'

"Gosh, homeward bound!" said Brown sentimentally. "Don't seem no time since we was goin' ashore in Rio."

"Yep, homeward bound," repeated Jimmy briskly, "and without Slade. That's what puts a feller's eye out—without Slade!"

Exactly. It put one's eye out. This was the one item Brown's puzzled mind had not yet fully comprehended. They were homeward bound, and Mr. Slade was not on board; furthermore, however the division buzzed, the officers were silent on the subject. Slade might never have existed for all the Chief or his assistants let drop. It was a mystery that Brown wanted explained.

"Beats me how it happened thataway," he confessed. "Did Froggy beat it?"

Red laughed.

"No, we beat it," he explained. "Froggy couldn't swim fast enough."

"Gee whiz, did he fall overboard?" exclaimed Brown.

"It was this way, Brownie," explained Red. "The skipper says to Froggy, he says, 'Mr. Slade, we got you dead to rights, thanks to the efforts of them brave young tars, Pentlock and Brown. Yes, we got you dead to rights, Froggy,' he says, 'but we don't like the scandal of it,' he says, 'the newspapers sayin' that Navy officers is hop-smugglers, and all. We don't like it,' he says.

" 'But we'll stand it, Mr. Slade, and we'll press the charges—' he says—'if we have to. You're goin' home under arrest, Mr. Slade. But first, you can go ashore and say good-by to the friends you got it off'n,' he says. 'Now, don't forget to come back, Mr. Slade, don't forget to come back.' "

"That's what happened," said Red. "Froggy was beached. Best way out o' the mess, for the sake of the service."

"And," added Jimmy complacently, "here's us rollin' home, and there's him back in Rio, listed as a deserter this very minute—or will be, soon's the time's up. Beached in Rio, and won't never trouble poor gobs no more—hooray!"

Brown thought it over. Surprizing information, and pleasant. Yet, somehow, he felt kind of sorry for Mr. Slade.

"Darned if I'd like to have to stay in that town," he observed. "It ain't like home, what with all them spigs and everything. No, it ain't like home. You give me Norfolk or Philly—them's the towns!"

*When an Airman Grows Too Old to Fly*

# The Kink

By THOMSON BURTIS

FINLEY strode to the desk of the operations clerk in the flying office and inquired with a sunny Irish smile—

"Well, what old hulk do I haul around the field for flying time today?"

The grizzled old sergeant's eyes dropped, and he seemed to mumble his words in embarrassment as he pawed for a slip.

"The Larkin, sir!"

"What?" exploded Finley. "That superannuated old wreck? What the ——, sergeant, what the ——? For the last month I've been trying to get my paws on a good ship and all I get are crates that should be in a museum! ——, I'm sick of—"

"Oh, well, it isn't your fault."

A loud laugh resounded from the ceiling as young "Kink" Forell came out of the locker-room, helmet and coveralls on, goggles swinging in his hand, his parachute under his arm.

"Lieutenant James Finley, official scavenger of ships for McCook Field!" he gibed, his boldly handsome face twisted into a mirthless grin. "Gosh, you'll save the survey officer more trouble before this year is out, Finley, than any flyer in the army."

He stopped at the door to get in the last words. Radiant vitality oozed from every pore of the tall young flyer, and his greenish-gray eyes were sparkling.

Hot words rose to Finley's lips, which was unusual. If they did come there was an undercurrent of humor in them, as there had been when he had raved querulously at the sergeant. But Kink Forell could rub him the wrong way every time.

However, his habitual repression saved him, and he said mildly—

"Beat it, King, and do your stuff instead of talking it."

He went into the locker-room and got his flying clothes, coming out on the outside platform with a determined grin on his square, snub-nosed face. The freckles stood out prominently, as if he were slightly pale.

The foremost airplane laboratory in the world was spread before him as he descended the stairs as if walking in his

sleep. Drawn up in front of the row of hangars was a collection of ships, some of which might have been the fruit of a designer's nightmare. Motors upside down, monoplanes, triplanes, ships with both pontoons and wheels on them; single seaters, two seaters, ships that could carry eight men; the little Sperry, a gnat of the air with a tiny three cylinder motor, was ranged alongside the mighty Barling bomber.

For once Finley's mind did not indulge itself in a comparison of some of those shining ships with the craft of his own early days in the air. King Forell was taking off, he noticed, in one of the new pursuit jobs.

As the stalwart flyer walked up the line, seat-pack parachute under his arm, he was searching for the ship he was to fly. There it was, its dope cracked and discolored with age, looking the veteran it was. In fact, a fit ship for a has-been to fly.

He forced his mind away from that subject. His eyes rested on the Barling triplane. There was a ship! Weighing fourteen tons and capable of carrying six tons more; six Liberty motors to fly it and a crew of six men necessary to handle it properly, it was truly the leviathan of the air. What it portended for the future of aviation was something which the mind of a Finley could speculate upon forever.

"Jim! Jim Finley!"

It was the C.O.'s voice, and it cut through the drone of King Forell's twelve cylinder motor, now three thousand feet overhead. Finley turned and saw the major standing with a group of men alongside some expensive motor cars.

"Those Congressmen from Washington," he remembered, and walked toward them.

"This is Jim Finley, gentlemen," the major said jovially, and went on to introduce him.

"These gentlemen were discussing the first test flight of the Barling, Jim," he went on, "and I was telling them that you were the man who hopped it off, just as you came along.

"At that time," he pursued, turning to the interested Congressmen, "Finley was chief test pilot of the Air Service. He flew the Barling when it had never been off the ground before, and did a great job."

One stout, jovial legislator shook his head smilingly.

"That must take a unique and extraordinary brand of nerve," he stated. "In fact, having your job must mean a continuous succession of—"

"We took him off a few months ago," the major interrupted with a quick look at Finley, "to give him a rest."

"And a —— of a rest, too," Finley said with his slow grin. "Hauling the oldest hulks on the field around."

"A contrast to flying the newest, eh?" laughed one of the Washington men. "Well, I congratulate you on being the first man to fly that—that monster there. And doing it successfully."

"No credit to me," Finley explained. "I flew a lot before the war, was an instructor a week after it broke out and shortly after that was sent to the Caproni school in Italy. They're three-motored babies, you know, so big ships have been my dish."

"Well, I guess Forell is about ready," the major said, somewhat awkwardly.

He seemed ill at ease, Finley noticed, when the past was mentioned.

"Glad to have met you all."

Finley smiled, and started for his ship. Forell was evidently going to give the visitors an exhibition. Well, no one could do a better job.

Despite himself, his mind roved back to that day when he had tested the Barling, and particularly to the banquet which the manufacturers had given that night in a Dayton hotel. The chief himself had been there, and as toastmaster he had introduced—

"Undoubtedly the best big-ship pilot in America—Jim Finley!"

All in all, that had been the high point of his flying career, Finley admitted, as

his eyes caressed the great ship which lorded it over the line.

Suddenly the roar above grew louder, and he stopped to watch. Three lounging pilots looked upward, and the swarm of mechanics on the line quit work entirely. When King Forell was flying there wasn't a great deal accomplished on McCook Field.

The little scout shot downward, motor wide open, in a terrific dive. Two, three, four thousand feet it dropped like a bullet. As it swooped out, barely five hundred feet above the ground, Forell fairly stood it on its tail. It bored its way upward a full half mile in a few seconds. At the very top of the climb it arched over, as if to loop, but as it got upside down it turned slowly on its horizontal axis. It ended up on an even keel, without jerkiness or hesitation, and instantly went into another one of those breathtaking dives.

"Boy, what ships!" Finley was thinking, as he saw the single-seater flashing earthward at a speed of more than three hundred miles an hour.

Duralumin construction, even to the aileron controls, all-metal prop, capable of a hundred and seventy-five miles an hour on the level. What King was doing would not have been possible two short years before.

For this time King scraped the ground as he came out of that bullet-like dive, and again the ship was darting almost straight upward. But this time it was turning in a two-turn-upward tailspin.

"There," reflected Finley, "is the best acrobatic pilot I ever looked at. By the same token, he's a bird that's so far from being wise to himself that he'll ruin his chances if he don't look out. He could be a great guy in the service, if he doesn't spoil his own chances!"

He moved slowly toward his ship as the "Kink" went into a continuous series of stunts. Barrel-rolls, half-rolls, loops, spins, falling leaves, upside down spirals—the whole gamut of aerial maneuvers was accomplished without loss of altitude or a second of rest between stunts.

And young Forell, less than two years out of West Point, was more of a flyer than showed up there right then, Finley admitted to himself. There wasn't a test pilot on the field who could come down after flying a new job and analyze its performance as well as the Kink. Finley's own ability to recommend changes in big ships' construction which would improve them, was Forell's on the scouts, and there was no reason why, with further experience, he shouldn't be a whiz on any old plane at all. Every wire and strut and spar, every eighth of an inch of span or chord, every degree of incidence or dihedral—all had their message for the brilliant youngster, and his recommendations on new jobs had been uniformly accurate. They were thinking, Finley had heard, of sending him to Tech for a four year course in aero-dynamics and design. Well, they couldn't pick a better man.

"If only he wasn't such a pup. Shame, too," Finley thought to himself.

FORELL'S exhibition was done as Finley reached his ship and started strapping his parachute around the back of his thighs. As he snapped the shoulder and crotch straps together at his waist, his placid blue eyes swept the mechanic.

"If anybody's got any insurance they want to collect, come on and take a ride," he said with a grin. "Draw a chute, and hop in."

The men glanced at each other beneath bent heads.

"I got to fix up Sixty-nine right away, sir," the chief said awkwardly, and the crew men had excuses.

Finley nodded. He was not surprized. Nevertheless, the lines were a bit deeper, from nostrils to mouth, and his mouth a little thinner, as he climbed up on the trailing edge of the left wing, and worked himself ahead to the pilot's cockpit.

The Larkin was a two-motored bomber, one motor set on each lower wing, just far enough from the pilot's cockpit to allow the propellers to rotate. As it was, the tips of the big six-foot sticks

almost grazed the cowling of the compartment, which jutted forth in front of the wings. It was a four-ton ship, with a wingspread of more than eighty feet. Two years before it had been king of its kind; now it was obsolete.

Finley's hand dropped to the two throttles alongside his seat, and in a second the left-hand Liberty was turning up fifteen hundred as his eyes swept the instruments. Then the-right hand motor went into full cry, and his eyes read the tale of the needles before him.

He nodded to the crew men, and after they had pulled the wheelblocks he turned the ship on a dime by giving the right motor full gun. The aged Larkin swept around to the left and, as it faced the field, Finley cut the throttle.

Kink Forell was about to land, but he was coming down toward the northern edge of the field in a nose dive. Fifty feet above the trees the scout swept upward, and on its back. As it came swooping out of the loop its under-carriage seemed to graze the trees. It zoomed upward, banking as it rose, until it hung in the sky with idling motor, left wing pointed at the ground. It dropped almost straight downward in a vertical side-slip, straightening just above the ground.

It skidded wildly from side to side as Forell fishtailed it, and landed lightly on three points.

"Landing out of a loop," thought Finley. "He'll get bawled out for that, but he won't mind."

He could see the Kink now as he came up to the group of distinguished guests to receive congratulations. Tall and slim and smiling, the sun glinting from his red hair, he'd laughingly deprecate the compliments which he loved so well.

Finley taxied out, turned his ship and shoved both throttles ahead. He leaned against the wheel, and got the nose down as the Larkin bumped massively along the ground. As he eased it off the ground, however, it suddenly became easy to fly—the controls answered the mere hint of pressure on the wheel.

Finley's square face was set and his eyes abstracted, as he circled the field for altitude. There was no doubt that most of the men on the field suddenly lost their wild desire to take a flight when it was Finley who invited them. Perhaps it was accidental, but—

Of course, he had had a streak of bad luck lately. Four wrecks, as a matter of fact, in a little more than a month. It was just a run of accidents, of course. On that forced landing the wheels had hit a log and the ship turned over. Another time, one of those —— reversible pitch propellers had suddenly gone into its negative position ten feet above the ground and snapped the nose down. The other crashes had been right on the field —bad aircurrents. When a man got into a run of luck of that kind he'd crash into an oasis with the whole Sahara desert to land on.

Perhaps that was the reason for his flying assignments, too. Like this Larkin, for instance. When the Larkin was a brand-new wonder he had been chief test pilot. In fact, he had been responsible for setting those motors on the wings themselves. They had been trussed up between upper and lower wings then. Five miles an hour more speed and greater ease of handling had been the results of that suggestion. That was the sort of stuff Kink Forell could do. He'd be even better with more experience.

Suddenly Finley's mouth widened in a wintry grin. When he and this Larkin had taken their first flight they had been kings, with a thousand people watching admiringly. Now they were limping through the sky—a couple of has-beens.

It was starting to darken a little. The sun was down, and it was time to land. He eased the great ship down over the trees and leveled off with both motors cut to idling. It was slowing, now. Time to pull back on the wheel.

As he pulled the wheel back the ship settled. But, as it dropped, there was no contact with the earth. Finley, suddenly tense, felt the sickening rush downward. It was a full ten feet before the wheels found the earth, and there was a crash as

the huge plane staggered back into the air. His hand found the throttles in a split second, and the Libertys were roaring. The ship settled again, and he fought it off the ground for a taut ten seconds. Gradually it picked up flying speed, and then he dared to look back.

A crumpled wheel marked the spot where he had hit. Doubtlessly the rest of the under-carriage was an ugly mess of splintered struts and a crushed wheel.

There was wild excitement on the line as the Larkin thundered low across the field. They were pointing, jumping up and down, pointing to the under-carriages of other ships. The Larkin was vibrating so that Finley himself was bounced from his seat, at times, against his loose belt. The wreck of the under-carriage had weakened the basic spar-structure of the entire ship.

"Do they think I'm a —— fool?" Finley raged suddenly, and the fingernails of his free hand dug into the flesh.

"Steady, now," he advised himself, and throttled the wild uprising within him.

There was but one thing to do. He couldn't land four tons at fifty miles an hour, without wheels. And the Larkin wasn't worth saving, anyhow.

It was so left-wing heavy now that it took all the strength in Finley's powerful shoulders to keep it on an level keel, and the vibration was so terriffic that he could see the wing tips oscilate. The thousand-pound motors seemed to be striving to tear themselves loose, and each landing and flying wire gave an illusion of being a dozen.

If only the old hulk would hang together for five minutes! That would get him over the vast expanse of Wilbur Wright Field, seven miles north. He circled houses and avoided traveled roads as he fought desperately to keep his stricken ship in the air. It was weakening fast. At any moment it was liable to tear itself apart. He must not let it fall in a thickly settled section.

As he reached the edge of the vast air-drome, seven miles outside of Dayton, it was impossible to keep the left wing up at all. The Larkin was like a bird with a broken wing, falling sidewise.

He unstrapped his belt, holding to the wheel as he tried to keep the nose up. Facing the rear of the ship, one hand on the wheel behind him, he gathered himself.

To slip would be fatal now. Those two propellers were like buzz-saws and should he be thrown into either of them he would be carved up as butter by a knife.

One foot was on the seat. Directly ahead of him was the bomb compartment, its top three feet below the upper wing, even with the back of his seat. Eight long feet away was the observer's cockpit, a round hole in the wide fuselage.

Using one leg as propelling force, he loosed his grasp on the wheel and hurled himself forward, sliding on his stomach across the bomb compartment. Instantly the great bomber fell into a whirling spin. He was being hurled off his perch as his hands found the cowling around the cockpit, and he hung there desperately, dragging himself forward.

The spin was terriffic now, due to the wingheaviness, and four tons were screwing earthward in a hell of shrieking wires. He fought to one knee, then got one foot on the fuselage.

Just as one hand found the ripcord ring he was hurled from his ship like a drop of water flung from a speeding wheel. An uncontrollable, strangled cry of fear escaped him as he found himself in space with a pack which was supposed to open on his back.

He fell end over end as he forced himself to count a full, slow five. His brain was numb, but the one idea which gripped him was that he must avoid that ship.

He jerked the ripcord, and with a sob of relief felt the little pilot chute snap out. The next second it had pulled the folds of glistening silk from the bag, and his body was jerked double as the shoulder springs rose.

His waist was sore as a boil as he swung in sickening arcs below the chute. Sometimes he was even with it. As the pendulum-like rushes through the air slackened,

a great ball of fire burst from the ground.

The Larkin had made its last flight.

He was nearing the ground now, and it seemed to be coming up to meet him with ever-increasing speed. Fifteen feet a second, that was the speed of the drop, but now, less than a hundred feet high, it seemed terrific. He was close to the hangars, too, but he'd hit the ground before he was blown against them.

His hands grasped the shroudlines which ran from the harness to the edges of the big silk umbrella, and he loosened his muscles. As he hit the ground he pulled his body upward, and bent his knees like a man who lands from a jump.

He snapped off his harness before the breeze could drag him, and had the billowing silk in hand as Captain Adams puffed up to him.

"What happened?" gurgled the captain. "Or do you always come down that way?"

Finley wet his lips with his tongue. Seemed as if he did always come down that way, at that.

"Wiped the under-carriage off at McCook," he drawled equably. "There's a ship landing to bring me home right now, I guess. Will you have the boys clean up the fire?"

"Sure. Want a drink?"

He did, but he shook his head. Somehow he wanted to escape before the other officers at Wilbur Wright gathered around to ask questions.

"That's Dick Redding, I think, after me."

He walked out to meet the McCook ship, and Redding, who had succeeded Finley as chief test pilot, motioned to the rear cockpit. As Finley got in, Redding threw a "Glad you got out all right!" over his shoulder, and took off without delay.

AS THEY walked side by side, back at McCook, from the line to the flying office Finley could barely restrain himself from bursting into wild self-condemnation. Why was wiry, weatherbeaten little Redding so quiet? Finley wondered as he threw cheerful answers to the questions which bombarded him from mechanics.

"Well," Redding said finally, "The Larkin's not much loss, at that. She was due."

"Uh-huh. But I ought to be given twenty kicks in the pants and the booby prize! Thinking about everything else but flying! When that pocket hit me I was in dreamland."

They were going up the steps, and as they approached the door of the office some one was talking as if he were laying down the law.

"—kill himself, I tell you! There's something the matter with him! Why, how in —— could—"

Redding fairly threw himself in front of Finley, and pushed the door open. Sudden silence fell over the four flyers who were lounging around on the desks.

"Got out without a scratch, eh?" queried fat, blond "Brad" Sparks. "Well, you can't kick!"

Kink Forell's loud laugh rang out.

"Let's see, Finley, this makes you a German ace, doesn't it? You've brought down five American ships within a month."

"That's nothing," Redding slid in. "I once—"

"—— if you haven't got the world's record for short landings!" The vibrant youngster went on loudly. "When you land a ship, it doesn't roll a foot!"

Finley despised himself for the inclination he had to answer the cocky Forell in blazing words. It was hard to control himself.

"Sort of hard on wheels, though, my method is," he said slowly, a set smile on his face.

"Prettiest landing I ever saw!" gibed Forell, hard mockery in his eyes. "Perfect dive, great leveling off, tail skid down just as she was losing speed—ten feet in the air! Boy! What a darb that one was! I never—"

"Shut up, Kink!" snapped Redding. "Come on Jim, let's get the report out of the way and shoot it over!"

"Why don't you issue muzzles along

with helmets around here?" snapped Forell, his eyes flashing his resentment at the curt command. "I suppose I hurt the poor old boy's feelings, eh? I'm sorry, papa, if I caused any tears."

"Are you going to talk all day, for ——'s sake?" exploded Redding. "For the love of Mike get out of here until this report's fixed up, will you?"

"No. I'm not ready yet. Listen, Finley, though, on the level. You ought to get out of this flying game. You get old young in this racket, and you'll kill yourself before you know it. I'll bet the flight surgeon'd find more things wrong with your eyes than—"

"Oh, ——," breathed big Franklin wearily. He darted a look at Finley, who was seated at the desk. "Say, Kink, I need a little advice, too. Have you any suggestions to make as to how I can improve my cross-country?"

"—— if you don't need some, at that!" the youngster shot back nastily. "You get lost enough. Well, so long. I'm going to town. Better take my tip, papa, on the doc."

He slammed the door after him. Brad Sparks' round, good-natured face wore a frown as he remarked—

"In just about six months the Kink's going to know so much that he won't be worth a single, solitary ——!"

As Finley took up the pen, the labored conversation of the others reached his brain without making sense, as the knowledge smote him that they were trying to avoid hurting his feelings, and were sore at Kink for that reason. He, Jim Finley, who'd been flying bamboo kites before they'd ever seen a plane, and was leading flights of bomb-laden Capronis across the mountains when they thought a ninety horsepower Jenny was the only airplane in the world! They didn't kid him—didn't kid him when the favorite trophy of McCook Field was an elaborate bronze shield whereon were engraved, with great pomp and ceremony, the names of the men who pulled really classic bones!

——, they were sorry for him!

He got very drunk that night with Frankie DeShields, a jovial airman whose firm belief it was that any landing from which one emerged alive was a good landing, and that there were no good flyers dead nor poor ones alive.

Finley's head was throbbing dully next morning as he went through reports listlessly. It was ten o'clock when the telephone rang. He stiffened as he recognized the voice which reached his ears.

"Jim? Major Carrol, Jim. How about dropping over right away for your six hundred and nine?"

"Why, doc, I just had my semi-annual three months ago. It's not due until—"

"I know it, but we're getting at 'em early this time to ease the rush. Come right over, eh? Good."

There was a curious constriction around his heart as he walked to the hospital. He wondered whether the doctor thought he'd fallen for that stuff about starting the regular physical examinations earlier? Why in —— couldn't anybody around the field come out in the open, and say what they had to say, with no bones about it?

The spry, scrawny little medico kept up the bluff, though, and filled out long questionnaires and put the big flyer through the revolving chair and went over his scarred body from feet to ears. Linley, outwardly placid, felt the growing tautness of every nerve within him. Why bother with all this junk? Why not get to the most important item at once, instead of stalking around?

"All O.K.!" the chipper little doctor said cheerily. His eyes were glinting behind his sparkling glasses. "Now we'll take a peek at the eyes, and we'll be through."

In a moment Finley had the end of two twenty-foot strings in his hands, attached to two small, movable uprights which ran on runners in a lighted box on the wall. Straining his eyes to the utmost, he strove to adjust those small sticks until they were side by side. The major, silent and intent, made him do it three times, and then set him to peering through special lenses and trying to adjust them until a line of light cut the

center of an electric bulb squarely. He peered through a stereoscope, and picked out different shades of pink and red from a collection of colored yarns. Finally, he was in front of the vision chart.

His eyes watered with the effort he made to read the twenty-twenty line, and there was perspiration on his forehead as he tried to pick out letter after letter from that blurred mass. He was weak as a kitten when he followed the major into the office.

The kindly medical man settled himself behind his desk.

"Jim, I've got to take you off flying."

Finley's tongue licked his parched lips as he stared at the major, like a man paralyzed.

"Your vision is way below normal—possibly due to overstrain—and more important still, your muscle balance is out of plumb. Your stereoscopic vision is imperfect. It may be curable with rest, or it may be simply the natural result of growing a little older. Anyhow, I must take you off."

"But, doc, can't you get a waiver from Washington? Once before—"

"In that case, Jim, I couldn't recommend it. You can fly as an observer, of course." Finley took the blow standing up.

"Sure. I won't lose—any pay."

He could scarcely comprehend the full meaning of what had happened as he walked slowly to the mess-hall. He was numb, somehow, mind and body. As the babble of voices from within reached him he gathered himself, and forced himself to lounge in and nod smilingly to a couple of visiting flyers. When he settled himself at the long table which the test pilots gathered around, he saw the unspoken question in the eyes of Redding, Sparks and the others.

"Well," he drawled. "You boys seem to be eating with a corpse."

"Huh?" barked Redding.

"Just saw the doc," Finley went on, his eyes busy with his plate as he shook three times as much salt on it as he wanted. "It seems that my dandruff is gradually making me just a shell of my former self, and the left tonsil, I believe, is about to explode. And my halitosis—why, it's a wonder I'm alive!"

"What happened?" demanded Brad Sparks, looking squarely into Finley's eyes.

"I'm taken off flying," Finley said calmly.

"I told you so!"

It was Kink Forell, just taking his seat.

"So you took my tip, eh? I knew it was the thing to do. You'd of killed yourself in another week. You get old young in this game!"

Finley's brows knit. —— the weakness which made him bridle at every cocky word of Forell's. The red-head had his goat. Just then his words had been a crow of triumph, Finley thought, because he, Forell, had called the turn.

"I wish to —— you'd get old enough soon to keep your mouth shut once in a while," Fairbanks told him levelly, but the Kink did not resent it. He was in high good humor.

"Conversation," he said airily, "is the spice of a meal."

Finley went through his office work mechanically that afternoon, and at four o'clock he was through. He got up from his desk wearily, lighted a cigaret and stared out of the window at the flying field. The Kink was testing a new monoplane pursuit job. The trim, shining little plane was cavorting madly through the sky, like a dragon-fly at play. It frolicked among the silvery, cumulous clouds, and as it darted in and out, hung on its back and dived furiously in joyous exuberance, Finley suddenly sat down at his desk again. His eyes were still staring unseeingly out of the window.

For a moment his mouth worked, then was still. He leaned on the desk. At thirty-five he was a discard in the flying deck—an outcast from the kingdom he had helped to build, part of which he had ruled.

"And now, gentlemen, I want to introduce undoubtedly the greatest big-ship pilot in America."

His head dropped to his folded arms. That afternoon was his Gethsemane, and he got very drunk again that night.

AS THE weeks passed his tranquil exterior was not entirely assumed. It wasn't as bad as he had thought, and the ache within him became only a dull one. Dick Redding took over the big-ship work after Brad Sparks was killed, and Finley was always a passenger on test flights. His judgment of performance, and analysis of it, was as accurate as ever, which helped his self-esteem. It warded off the time when the ground would be his exclusive habitat, and the work of the air would go completely past him.

Nevertheless, the pride of the pilot, which passeth all understanding, was strong within him, and there was no earthly eminence which could replace what he had lost.

And Kink Forell never missed an opportunity to remind him of what he had lost. The Kink was going wild. His callous kidding of Finley, unrelieved by any undercurrent of humorous raillery, had crystallized the growing weariness of the little group of flyers with Forell and all his works. The brilliant youngster sensed the change in feeling toward him, and something indomitable in him made him deliberately pursue the course which had caused it.

He received no more casual compliments about a particularly skillful bit of work, so he went wild trying to force them from the taciturn airmen. His flying brought frequent gasps from even the old-timers, and scarcely a day passed, toward the end of the month, when Forell's matchless airmanship was not a topic of conversation—when he was not around.

Finley's animosity toward him grew in strength. That the Kink was like an annoying hornet, buzzing around him constantly in an endeavor to sting him, was not important. Forell grew to blame Finley for his ostracism, and never missed an opportunity to get in a dig. That didn't matter. A fat-headed young fool like Forell couldn't affect Finley's peace of mind for a moment.

Rather, the older man's dislike was the result of his utter contempt for Forell's blind insanity. There was a bird with a brilliant future, he reflected a thousand times, who was throwing away his chances for an ideal life, through sheer egotism. A born aerial engineer, a flying genius, young, handsome, loving his work—why, the Kink could be one of the biggest men in the service, and an asset to it.

But because he was a stubborn, unbearably conceited brat, a year or so would see him dead, or an outcast, unless he mended his ways. Never had he been so cocky and domineering, nor his tongue so nasty, as now, when the dislike of his fellow-pilots was something tangible in the very atmosphere.

But he was showing the strain, Finley observed when he met him one Saturday morning in the adjutant's office. The Kink's lean face was thinner, he was somewhat pale, and there was an unhealthy glitter in his eyes as he said—

"What are you doing here?"

"Got to see the major at ten."

"That's funny as ——! So've I! What does he want with the two of us?"

"You go in together," the adjutant informed them. "Shoot!"

The C.O. was standing behind his desk, a paper in his hands.

"Morning, gentlemen. Get ready to take off in a Briston as soon as you can pack a bag," he said crisply. "The reserve squadron down at Nashville are dedicating a hangar they've built on some lot they've leased for a flying field. They're getting a couple of Jennies to get in flying practise on. There's a banquet tonight. Forell, you give 'em a flying exhibition this afternoon. Finley, they want you for a speech at the banquet tonight. Don't go crazy, Forell—just give 'em a little show.

"Better start right away. It's a two hour and a half trip. You'll be put up down there. If you're having a good time, you needn't come back until Monday morning.

"Good luck. That's all."

"Boy, this'll be fun!" Forell chuckled jubilantly as they went out. "Ever been in Nashville? They sure have good-looking Janes there, and we'll be cocks of the walk. You're not too old to like the woen, are you?"

"How soon can you be ready?" demanded Finley. "I'll be set in half an hour."

"Me too. Let's hope you don't crash as a speechmaker, anyhow! I do the flying and you tell 'em how, eh?"

"See you in half an hour."

They took off promptly in the trim observation plane. It was of duralumin construction, and capable of any kind of acrobatic work. It could do a hundred and fifty miles an hour on the level, and represented the last word in a two-seated fighting plane.

Finley, like all pilots, was uncomfortable without his own hand at the stick, but Forell was not called on to meet any emergencies as they roared down the Big Miami to its junction with the Ohio, thence down that majestically muddy stream to a point above Louisville where they cut southwest across the Kentucky mountains until they hit the Louisville-Nashville railroad. From there it was but a half-hour run across the brooding, wooded hills to their destination.

THERE were fully five thousand people at the field, and shortly after they had landed Forell went up for his exhibition.

With that swarm of spectators intent on his every move, the Kink was inspired. Finley watched him send the Briston hurtling across the sky in a breath-taking dive, upside down, and then bring the ship out of it through a straight nose dive that drew shrieks from the women and awed comments from the men. It darted upward on its tail, spinning a full turn, and there was speed enough left under Forell's handling to allow him to arch it over on its back once more. For a moment it gathered speed, upside down, and then did a complete roll which left it upside down again. Another instant to gather speed, and he had flopped it over on an even keel once more.

Finley, his eyes shining with admiration, told the reserve officers—

"There, boys, is about the best stunt pilot you'll ever loook at!"

Shortly afterward the two McCook men left the field in the cars of their hosts. Finley was to stay with a young lawyer who was plainly honored to have him as a guest, and by the time several fingers of mountain dew, collected in the shine of the moon, had done its work, he was having an excellent time.

The banquet, it appeared, was not restricted to the reserve squadron, for there were fully five hundred people around the tables when Finley got up to speak.

He was surprized at their absorbed attention. He did not realize that the passion for the air which had absorbed him for eighteen years shone through his slow, almost halting words, and made them live. He was stunned at the solid applause when he sat down.

The toastmaster was on his feet.

"You know who you've been listening to," he told the enthusiastic crowd. "One of America's greatest pilots. Here's where the program is supposed to end, and it's getting late, but I think we all feel like just a word or two from Lieutenant Forell."

Kink leaped to his feet, his face flushed and his words tumbling over themselves as the applause smote him.

"All I can say is that you've been listening to a man who can't fly any more, so what he says means something. He knows, and he—can't do any more to develop the game. That's what lays ahead of all flyers—either have to quit, worn out and through, or get killed. But who cares? It's the greatest game in the world!"

Finley's face did not change. Forell had to dramatize himself, of course.

They took off Monday morning at eight o'clock, but there were fully five hundred people at the field to bid them good-by. Finley, his hand itching for

the stick, sat tensely while the Kink took off. Forell held the ship close to the ground, and then zoomed it over the hangar. He followed the curve of the roof around, the wheels almost touching it, and dived briefly down the other side.

Finley relaxed. The grandstanding was over now, he hoped.

As the Briston droned swiftly across the rugged mountains Finley's flyer's instinct literally forced him to sweep the ground ceaselessly with his eyes. Most of the time he had a tiny clearing or a possible field always in mind in case the motor started missing. That was tough country down there.

He stiffened as there came a break in the even rhythm of the Liberty. For a moment the motor spat and missed. Then, for a moment, it fired steadily.

Finley was ready to sink back thankfully in the rear seat when the four hundred and fifty horsepower engine coughed again. His eyes leaped to the tachometer. Only nine hundred revolutions.

Forell did all he could. He jazzed the throttle, dived steeply, and tried the spark at all positions. The motor was stumbling along, its r.p.m. only seven hundred now.

Finley's hand gripped Forell's shoulder. He pointed down at the one possible field, three thousand feet below. Forell nodded impatiently, and turned to his work.

The field was an oblong, and very short on its longest side. Squarely in the middle of it stood a single tree, which turned the possible landing space into two strips, scarcely twenty-five yards wide. It was on a steep slope, and at its lower edge another hill, heavily wooded, started rising from the very rim of the field. As they spiraled down over it, Finley saw that in order to land uphill, the ship would be forced, willy-nilly, into a fairly steep glide down that other slope.

Forell was a master-flyer, but nevertheless it was agony for even the self-controlled Finley to sit idly by and watch Forell fly. Perfection in judgment and airmanship was necessary if they were to make that field in safety. There was not so much as a cabin within five miles, should they be hurt.

Kink started banking for the field halfway up the slope which faced it. As the nose swung toward the clearing the pilot stopped the spiral when the radiator was pointed toward the field at an angle.

While the tense Finley wondered, momentarily, what he was going to do, Forell sent the Briston into a gradual side-slip. It dropped down the mountainside with scarcely thirty miles an hour of forward speed, and he did not swing the nose for the right hand strip until the ship was at the very end of the towering trees which formed the barrier.

He dropped it over them, fishtailed it with the rudder, and set it down squarely in the middle of the landing lane. It trundled past the tree with scarcely ten feet of clearance on each wing, and came to rest twenty yards from the woods at the upper end.

The landing had been perfection itself.

"Sounded like water in the jets!" yelled Kink as he snapped off the switches.

Finley nodded as he hit the ground. That had been his diagnosis of the trouble, exactly.

He measured the field briefly with his eyes, and got the tool-kit out as Forell climbed out.

"We'll take a look," Finley drawled. "Let's hope it's just a jet."

"——, there's no hurry," announced Forell, lighting a cigaret. "We'll either have to get those trees—some of 'em—cut down, or else tear the ship down and send it home. We can't get out."

"Can't get out?" repeated the bewildered Finley, jet wrench in hand. "Why—"

"Of course not!" snapped Forell, his eyes blazing suddenly. "There isn't a chance—"

"Well, let's look at the jets, anyway," Finley cut in calmly, and went to work on the carbureter.

Forell paced up and down nervously as Finley worked without saying a word. Occasionally the big red-head darted a

puzzled look at his stalwart, silent companion. Neither had anything to say until Finley had the jets out and was peering through the tiny openings.

"There she is!" he said triumphantly. "Look!"

The water bubble in the high speed jet was plain to be seen. Forell took a quick look through it. As Finley blew it out the Kink said jerkily:

"As soon as we get her back we'll make for that town over north and see about getting some men to cut down some trees. We might be able to leave by tomorrow."

His eyes blazed a challenge to Finley, but the older man said placidly—

"Let's see whether she works first, anyhow."

His mind was busy, however, with the implications in the Kink's words. With eighteen years of experience behind him, he came close to knowing what could and what could not be done on a take-off. This one would have to be perfectly flown, but it could be done.

"Get in, and I'll swing the prop," he directed.

"Oh, what the ——'s the use?" Kink started, and then stopped.

He climbed in the front cockpit, his face sullen and his blue eyes glinting. Finley picked up two sizable rocks for wheelblocks, and then swung the propeller as Forell handled switches and throttle. The Liberty, still warm, caught at once, and idled along sweetly.

Forell turned it up a little, and tried it on either switch. He put it through its paces, with the spark in all positions, and it seemed to Finley that he was disappointed because it fired without a miss.

Suddenly the motor died, and Forell was on the ground.

"Well, let's get started for help!" he barked. "I'll go and you guard the ship."

"Go for help, nothing," Finley told him, putting the tool-kit away. "We're going to take off!"

"Are you crazy!" yelled Forell, his face pale and drawn. "Why, ——, there isn't a Chinaman's chance of getting out of here!"

"The —— there isn't," Finley said levelly, his eyes not two feet from Forell's. "Listen. We get the ship up in the upper right hand corner here, swing her around, and block the wheels. Give her the gun, and right after she's hopped the blocks she'll be under full steam. Go diagonally for the left hand side of the tree, and right there swing her with right rudder to the lower right hand corner. That'll give us several extra yards."

"——! You must be going blind! Why listen, you superannuated old fool, we'd crash into those trees just as sure as we're standing here!"

"We would not," Finley said slowly.

"I say we would. And I'm the pilot of this ship; I've got the say, and I won't take her off!"

He seemed to be half-crouched, as if prepared to fight for his very life.

"Oh, you won't!" Finley said with deadly calmness. His eyes flickered over the youngster before him with cold contempt.

"No, I won't, and by —— I think you're going totally crazy! Want to add another wreck to your—"

"Listen, you puling brat!" blazed Finley, and now all the repression of months seemed to have been released, and with blazing eyes and a torrent of speech he fairly threw his words into the younger man's face.

"You won't take off, eh? A —— of a flyer you are! Got all the nerve in the world when the motor's going good and you've got a crowd watching you, haven't you? But when it comes to getting in there, out here in the wilderness, and giving her the gun when you've only got an even chance, you haven't got the guts!"

"Shut up, or I'll—"

"You'll do what?"

Finley spat his words at him. His powerful body seemed to grow and expand until it overshadowed the slim youngster. There was contempt and hate in his eyes as his tongue played around the alternately shrinking and then wildly furious Forell, like a whip. He flayed the man he despised, mercilessly, laying bare

the diseased spots within the outward semblance of the red-headed flyer.

Forell's fists were clenched, and his eyes had the light of madness in them as Finley welded iron into his soul by the heat of his wrath. Time after time, during that stream of deadly insults which poured from the transfigured Finley's mouth, it seemed that Forell was going to leap on him. Finley, giving not a step nor shifting his eyes by so much as an inch, dared him to come on.

"And as true as ——!" he finished, "if you funk this take-off I'll climb in there myself and take her off, and I'll bring her back to McCook, and I'll label you in front of the whole cock-eyed world for the yellow-bellied, chicken-hearted, gutless —— that you are!"

For a moment he played with the idea. He pictured himself coming in, having made the take-off that Kink Forell couldn't make. That would show them whether he was through or not.

He put temptation from him. He was dimly aware that he had played his trump card, as far as Forell was concerned. He hammered on along the same line—insulting, threatening, daring the snarling, hot-eyed pilot before him with a tongue tipped in vitriol and eyes that glowed their hate.

Suddenly Forell drew himself up tensely, and there were tears in his eyes as he shouted hysterically—

"All right, —— you, we'll go to —— together just to prove that you can't bluff me!"

He was trembling as he got into the front cockpit, and started the motor. Finley walked at the left wingtip as the ship taxied to the upper right-hand corner of the field, and there he helped swing it around. The rocks under the wheels, he got in. He was tight-lipped and grim-faced as he settled himself for his worst ordeal in eighteen years of flying.

What kind of a pilot would that quivering, hysterical youngster in the front seat be when he was flying for his life? The Kink was sure he was going to his death.

The Liberty roared into life, the throttle all the way ahead. The taut Finley felt the stick jam forward. An instant before the tires jumped the rocks the tail was in the air. Nose low to the ground, the Briston sped for the left hand opening between tree and forest.

Finley's hand was on the stick, his feet on the rudder, lightly. The right wingtip scraped past the tree with scarcely two feet to spare. At that instant the right rudder went on, and the ship angled for the corner of the field. It was headed for the lower right-hand angle of the field, now, where towering trees were like sentinels, alert to repel it.

The time had long passed when there was any chance of turning back. It was all or nothing, now. The ship was off the ground, rushing for those trees, barely five feet above the ground. It was nosed down slightly, gathering speed. Now the trees were dancing right in front of his eyes.

There Forell pulled back. The Briston shot upward, losing speed rapidly. It barely cleared the topmost branches as he leveled it off. It mushed downward, and there came a drag on the undercarriage.

Suddenly Forell was leaning forward as if to help his ship onward. With all his natural genius for estimating flying speed and the capabilities of a plane he fought it—fought to keep it in the air. In his desperation it seemed to the older man, straining forward against his belt, that the Kink worked up speed and tore the ship from those clinging branches by his own strength.

It was free. For a moment, banking ever so slightly, Forell held it level to gather speed. Then, the Liberty roaring triumphantly, the Briston winged its way upward like some suddenly liberated bird.

Finley relaxed limply. Somehow he was very weary. He was glad everything was all right, and that one of the most brilliant young pilots in the service had got over the hump.

As they spiraled down above McCook he noticed that just about everybody on the line was looking at them. Forell, who hadn't turned his head once, did not seem

to notice the attention they were attracting. As the ship taxied to the line a considerable group of mechanics and flyers gathered to meet it, which was unusual, to say the least.

Forell did not run out his motor, but snapped the switches off without delay. He was on the ground almost as quickly as Finley himself.

"Where did you pick the shrubbery?" demanded Dick Redding, pointing at the wheels.

Finley's eyes took in the sight. The wire wheels were stuffed with foliage from the branches that had escaped.

"Where did we get it?" repeated Forell loudly. "On a forced landing, that's where!

"We came down in a little tiny field no bigger than a hangar, in Kentucky. When we fixed her up I took a look. Didn't seem a chance to get out—not a chance. But I figured that we might do it by blocking the wheels and some other stuff, so I said, 'What the ——? Either we do or we don't!' So I give her the gun, get the tail up, do a snake-dance down this little pasture lot with trees all around it."

His flashing eyes met Finley's tranquil gaze, and he stopped talking as if a hand had been clapped over his mouth. There was fear in his eyes as Finley's held them.

"Yeah," Finley drawled placidly. "It was a tough spot, but the Kink made it. Who's got a cigaret?"

*What Makes a Good Indian*

# *Good Medicine*

By HARRY G. HUSE

MOSTLY, John Cut-Hand's story is a matter of open, ignoble record. His meager epic, blazoned on his lodge, in a better day, in ocher and flaming vermilion, is written in a penitentiary's annals. The sum of his days is there, and in the dusty files of our old State Dailies—faintly pathetic, had you seen the coughing old brave stumbling about Tom Lacey's bunkhouse; vaguely bitter, if you knew the Indian's need of evil returned for evil given.

Bitter, and curiously incomplete and unsatisfying—by the open records! Forty years in the big gray prison—a scant half-dozen crimson-flecked moons in the bright sunlight of final freedom—and a hard-won huddle of cottonwood poles in a tree crotch. The sum of a fierce spirit's days in a ragged bundle of bones and a dangle of tinkling trinkets.

In a dangle of tinkling trinkets?

They will not tell you that in Big Coulee.

In a blaze of glory, rather, in a stupendous blaze of glory, with suitable publicity that did the old jail-bird more than justice. In a mile-long parade with floats depicting Progress; in a war-dance by school children in costume. In pictures in thirty-eight various Sunday papers. In the biggest, livest "stunt" ever pulled off by any chamber of commerce in the state.

And when they have shown you the clippings and read you the captions of the pictures they will take you down to the little park along the moldering levee, and point out the old cottonwood itself in the brakes across the river.

"See that thing over there in the branches that looks like an overgrown crow's nest? That's him. That's Big Coulee's 'departed Indian chief'. Old John Cut-Hand himself, buried in proper Blackfoot style with all the trimmings. I tell you it put this town on the map. And say, maybe it didn't boost Clint Daggett right into the legislature with that bully speech of his about 'good medicine'!"

And there indeed, before your somewhat startled eyes, lies John Cut-Hand buried in the manner of his fathers, with

crows and magpies to attend him. Unworthy of so much honor, really—Big Coulee whispers. Hoisted into his cottonwood crotch by profane hands, surely, by the testimony of the clippings. Cherished for display along with two concrete grain elevators and a new steel bridge across the river. But secure in his final resting-place, nevertheless, as he desired it, with nothing but leaves and the blue sky above him. And close to his hand, in his jingling pouch with its handful of medicine trinkets, the part of his story that is neither open nor ignoble—the part Big Coulee does not know.

Old Tom Lacey knows, but he isn't telling Big Coulee. Not after the effort it took to straighten out his face. Why spoil her pleasure? Better to share John Cut-Hand's secret with only his one or two remaining cronies. Or to re-read Daggett's speech and chuckle grimly all by himself.

YOU WILL need to start with Tom Lacey and the records. For after all Big Coulee does not count.

You know Big Coulee already, a dozen, fifty of her. An old town drunk with growth and progress. Concrete paving clear out to the bunch-grass where the newest addition ends. New cluster lights on Front Street. A new hotel with a mezzanine floor. A park with a new memorial to the World War dead. Above all an alert chamber of commerce. "Welcome to Bigger Big Coulee, the Old Western Town with New Ideas," on the signboards as you come in along the old Mullan Trail.

With Tom Lacey it's different. He isn't actually of Big Coulee, though he had got his mail there since the days when it came up by Missouri river-packet. Things haven't changed so much at his ranch in the Highwoods, some twenty miles away. His herds have shrunk with the passing of free range. His ranch-hands are fewer and somehow a rather sorry lot. But he still owns the valley from a notch in the mountains down to where the wheat-fields have blanketed the bench-land and stolen into the foothills, and he does there largely as he has done for forty years.

It was no one's concern but his own, he felt, that he should bring John Cut-Hand up there from the penitentiary to cough in the sunlight before joining his fathers and their vanished buffalo. Once there had been a bond between the white man and the Blackfoot.

"We hunted together," Tom Lacey explained it to his foreman.

That "hunted together" went back almost a half-century to a boyish companionship as intimate as it was unusual. Tom Lacey, runaway from Virginia, had "gone Indian" when he first came west, and had wandered with the lodge of Curly Wolf, young Cut-Hand's father. For two glorious years the two youths had roamed together, close as any blood brothers, eager with youth, half-drunk with the glamor and adventure of the high, spacious plains.

But the terse statement, compressing into three words the most delightful experience in Tom Lacey's life, was typical of the old rancher. Typical also, his summary of John Cut-Hand's later infamy.

"He shot a white man, and they kept him forty years in jail."

There's more than that, but you must dig for it in the yellowed records.

Those records skip the first half-dozen years after young Lacey and Cut-Hand separated to follow the divergent destinies of white youth and Indian.

"I got ambitious and went to work," Tom Lacey fills in that gap. "The Indians wandered some more trying to find where the buffalo had gone to. Then they got pushed into reservations and told to settle down."

They settled down grudgingly, you will recall, to boredom and starvation, to degeneracy bred of the white man's whisky and diseases, and submission to his laws. But here and there those of stouter spirit flared up fitfully, like leaves falling on the embers of an almost burned-out blaze.

John Cut-Hand's crime was such a brief, futile flicker. "A treacherous killing," the old newspapers floridly headlined it. It was most certainly that, except by Blackfoot standards. The Indian shot from the dark in revenge, and then quietly slipped away.

But he had not tried to conceal his exploit. Tom Lacey was curiously proud of that.

" 'The brutal savage,' says the paper, 'did not see fit to deny his crime. In fact he boasted of his foul and felonious deed among his fellows on the reservation, and this fact alone is responsible for his apprehension. Nor does he seem contrite now that the court, with a laudable appreciation of the moral effect upon the Blackfeet, has speedily and justly condemned the blood-stained culprit to hang. His only regret seems to arise from his inability, following the killing, to scalp his cruelly murdered victim and add the horrid trophy to the other contents of his miserable medicine pouch.' "

The account touches lightly on the provocation for the killing. And against the background of major misunderstandings between whites and Indians it bulks very small indeed. John Cut-Hand found steers trespassing on the reservation. He rode them down and shot a dozen as he might have buffalo. The cowpuncher who was to be his victim three months later came upon him as he bent to the skinning, and put an irate bullet through the Indian's arm. John Cut-Hand said nothing of the incident to the agent, as the court maintained he should have done. Instead he rode by night, when his arm had healed, to a hillside which overlooked the round-up camp-fire. From the shelter of a bush he evened the score, as already reported, with a single shot.

Here the news accounts leave John Cut-Hand in an army post prison, awaiting the confirmation of his death sentence. And here Tom Lacey was wont to shake his head. He could appreciate the consistency with which John Cut-Hand had pursued his vengeance, could even have predicted the inevitable outcome of that first crippling shot. But he could not understand what followed.

"I put it down to his having to wait like that with a rope hanging over him, or to his maybe having half-way got religion," says Tom Lacey. "That was the only way I could account for it. He'd listened to the army chaplain's talk about forgiveness, and got things mixed up in his head."

The facts are these. At the end of a month John Cut-Hand contrived to escape, and took the prison bully, a big, blond, brutish deserter by the name of Anderson, with him.

Here the back files become more than florid. For that was no ordinary companionship, no ordinary escape, nor was there an immediate recapture.

You can still faintly sense the old-time correspondent's dissatisfaction with the inconsistencies of that escape—particularly John Cut-Hand's choice of a partner. He had needed no help. From the very first the white man must have been a hindrance. Of the two the wiry Indian was undoubtedly the only one capable of scaling the stockade. He must have waited at the top to aid his clumsier companion up after him.

So far his actions could have been the result of compulsion, of intimidation. There was evidence that the Indian had already accepted Anderson's dominance. Freed of the bully's presence, other prisoners had come forward to testify to his secret, despotic rule. John Cut-Hand had been put in his place, one claimed, on the very day of his arrival, when Anderson had felled him with a single blow.

But here was no case of mere submission. Some stouter bond had grown from that first encounter, some sentiment stronger than mere self-interest. For, in the twenty-foot drop from the stockade, Anderson was seriously crippled. And the Indian had not abandoned him to make his own escape. When the troopers picked up the trail in the light snow which fell the day after the fugitives' departure, they found the toed-in tracks

of one man on foot, a stolen pony's hoof-prints, and the dragging marks of a loaded travois, headed for the mountains.

They followed the trail into Bloody Rock Cañon, expecting momentarily to come upon the abandoned cripple. But there the first blizzard of winter howled down over the peaks to the westward, piled twenty feet of snow into the gorge ahead of them, and turned them back, empty-handed and frost-bitten.

Of the two fugitives whom the troopers trailed in mid-November they found only one alive when they again entered the mountains some five months later.

That was John Cut-Hand. He had penetrated some twenty miles beyond the point where his tracks had disappeared in the swirling snow of early winter. And though half-dead from emaciation and the torture of gangrened feet, he retained sufficient vitality to require a lusty blow on the head from a carbine butt before he could be properly subdued.

By what unbelievable feats of savage fortitude and endurance he had crossed one blizzard-swept range and come to rest, well up the side of a second, it seems no one could say. Nor by what unnatural quirk of Blackfoot character he had continued to cling faithfully to his hampering companion could any one who knew the fickle nature of the Indian quite surmise.

Clung he had. The bones, outside the rude shelter in which he cowered, established the presence of the stolen horse—bones cracked with a rock that the last crumb of marrow might be extracted from their hollow stems. And presently other bones, a huddle of them, so freshly gnawed by wolves that the articulations of legs and spine were still intact, bore witness of "Bully" Anderson.

By the thickened process midway of one grisly thigh-bone the troopers established two facts. First, that the injury which crippled Anderson had been, as they suspected, a leg broken in the leap from the prison stockade. Second, that John Cut-Hand had remained steadfast in his unnatural attachment for the other, by sharing the precious horse-meat and keeping his helpless companion alive throughout the winter, or at least until the bone had firmly set.

From the young Indian himself, when he recovered consciousness, they had a grunting, semi-intelligible confirmation of facts already guessed. The big blond man had come safely through the cold on the travois, and lived for a long time, four moons at least. Then in the night, so they interpreted, he was dead of a sudden sickness John Cut-Hand could not name. Dead beyond doubt, lying stiff and cold for two sleeps on a bed of pine boughs in the corner until John Cut-Hand carried him outside and sought unsuccessfully to hoist him to a secure position in a tree.

A story of one man's unswerving devotion for another. Nothing to disprove it. The grizzled sergeant had gone to squat again above the silent heap of bones. Grooves aplenty there were on the naked skull, and notches in the edges of certain ribs. But they were the marks of the wolfish fangs which had devoured whatever record of sudden dissolution the body might have held.

They buried the bones, and gave John Cut-Hand's sloughing, frozen feet such treatment as they were able. They bound up the fresh wound in the matted scalp that had been prison-cropped five months before and was now to be prison-cropped again. Then they loaded their captive on a pack-horse and brought him back across the range he had so uselessly conquered.

They brought this story of the bones with them, and the record of John Cut-Hand's delirious gruntings when the fever seized him on the second day. And for his deed the newspapers now acclaimed him.

"A felon's noble sacrifice in friendship's cause," they named it.

The story, a later and final despatch reports, found favor in high places. John Cut-Hand's sentence was commuted to a life in prison. There the last news accounts leave him making brooms and fancy horse-hair bridles.

TOM LACEY had no illusions about renewing a delightful boyish friendship when the prison doctor's stethoscope testified, and they turned John Cut-Hand loose to die in the open. He knew how forty silent years had clouded the old Indian's spirit and reason. But it was only natural for him to repay the hospitality of the lodge with that of the ranch-house. Nor was it, he felt, a matter for comment that he considered binding the promises made to soften the old consumptive's few remaining moons.

But here he found himself at variance with Big Coulee, the old western town with new citizens as well as new ideas.

Big Coulee understood dimly something of John Cut-Hand's dying desire to be buried in the tribal manner of the Blackfeet. But why need he have been so fussy and picked out so prominent a tree? Why not some place up in the mountains, or farther back in the brakes, instead of the old council cottonwood across the river? In full sight of half the town's front porches! Silly, and dangerous to public health, Big Coulee said, besides being savage and shuddery. Hadn't they a cemetery and burial regulations?

That was the way it stood when Lacey requested the permit from the town board in open meeting.

"It will do no harm," he carefully pointed out. "After all, you have to remember this country belonged to the Blackfeet long before any of us, even old-timers like myself, came here. The big cottonwood, for all it stands out so plainly, is a good two miles away, in rough country where no one ever goes. And you all know how a steer's carcass, for instance, dries right up, mummy-like, in this thin Montana air. It will be like that now, only even quicker. It isn't a question of the old Indian's record. Whatever mistakes he made have been paid for long ago. He hadn't had any freedom to speak of, for a man born to it. I shall be deeply obliged to you all if I may keep my word."

Reasonable enough, in the quiet manner of its asking, this request from a man whom even the newer, noisier citizens must respect. But such a horrid, gruesome thing to think of! And such a terribly depressing thing to see!

That was the way it still stood when Lacey finished and wiped his forehead. A grave in the fork of a tree. Ugh! A ghastly bundle. Right there before the eyes of every one—of the women and the children. Hungry coyotes howling at night, no doubt, and by day a squabble of birds, pecking, struggling, pecking. Ugh! Uuggghhhh!

So it stood, and so it would have continued to stand but for Clint Daggett and the association of commerce.

Daggett had waved his arms and said he'd suddenly had a vision—the fame of their town blazoned abroad in all the land. They'd do well, Daggett said, to consider Mr. Lacey's proposition. Already in his mind's eye, he shouted, he saw a picture. A primitive huddle of poles in the crotch of an old, storm-blasted cottonwood. In the background—easy if the camera were aimed right—Big Coulee's grain elevators, cozy bungalows, and modern stores. The old and the new—tradition and progress! A picture Sunday editors would fight for. Spread on the roto pages from Maine to California!

He'd waved his arms some more and made the others partly see it. Then he swept them all right off their feet.

"Big Coulee, Montana," it would say beneath the pictures, "does picturesque and fitting homage to memory of departed Indian chief."

Now they were all happy, talking, planning, putting people on committees. An awful to-do, though; more than a quiet man could stand. Lacey, vaguely depressed in this new old town that seemed less and less familiar, crossed the street and entered the semi-darkness of the little park. People no longer seemed to do things naturally, without a lot of fuss and bother. Too many lights, too many parked cars, too much concrete paving! The river was the same, gurgling along the forgotten levee, and the stars overhead,

and the notches off there in the hills.

He came to rest before the new memorial, and gazed up at the tense bronze doughboy and the carven list of the town's heroic dead.

"They gave their all in a noble cause," it said up there in big deep letters. A wry little smile came and twisted Tom Lacey's firm old lips. Nothing like that in the case of old John Cut-Hand! Shame and ignominy, no matter how you faced it. Renegade to the white man's law and then to the tribal law of his fathers. And now they were going to make him the excuse for a parade.

Well, they could make all the fuss and take all the photographs they wanted. John Cut-Hand wouldn't really mind. The gaunt old Indian stretched out stark, back there in Finch's undertaking parlors, was going to get the things he'd asked for anyway. His grave in the tree and—as soon as Tom Lacey could find it—that medicine pouch of the early news accounts, missing all these forty years.

To Tom Lacey, setting out on his quest the following morning, there returned something of the youthful thrill of impending adventure with which he and his Indian companion had ridden these plains, fifty years before.

Always he felt the romance of this country. Always he saw it through the eyes of the eager, pagan-hearted boy he had been when he first came here. The river valley, stark and barren, a ribbon of green water between thirsty, naked hills. The high plains where the buffalo had thundered in countless thousands. The lone buttes, pink at dawn; yellow and black with glare and shadow at mid-day; cool purple in the twilight. The distant Rockies, steel-blue saw-teeth against a lighter blue.

Romance still, somehow, despite his years and this automobile he was driving, despite the road, and the wheat-fields, and the dry-landers' barns and shacks on either side. They couldn't kill the old, wide, limitless feel of these sweeping benches no matter how they ruled them off with fences or speckled them with buildings. No matter how they whooped it up for change and progress in the towns.

He wriggled with a sudden, acute distaste at the thought of all that bustling about back there in Big Coulee. So much fuss over such simple things. He had sensed at the meeting something of the enthusiasm with which the town had suddenly about-faced on John Cut-Hand's burial. But he found later, when Daggett stopped in at the hotel, that he knew little enough of the capabilities of public interest, now that it was thoroughly aroused.

He had expected some "foolishness". A funeral procession, headed by Finch's new motor hearse, and attended by many automobiles. Some sort of ceremony at the tree, a speech, no doubt, on the "good old days" and a snapping of pictures.

But Big Coulee, inspired, by no means meant to celebrate John Cut-Hand's passing so lightly.

"The preparations already in progress," Daggett had announced, "will require at least a week. The committee on arrangements must dig in the library for data on Indian burial customs."

"You just put him on a platform out of the reach of the coyotes," Tom Lacey interrupted.

"The details," continued Daggett, with a hint of firmness, "must be correct. There is to be a news reel man from Great Falls with his moving picture camera. The school-children must be drilled. I must have time to look up the records and prepare an address to be delivered underneath the tree."

"You won't find anything to talk about," Tom Lacey cautioned. "You better just bury him as one of the original settlers, and let it go at that."

"Oh, I'll find some sort of jumping-off place for my address, in the records," Daggett chuckled. He winked a knowing eye. "You don't know me."

There was, Daggett had assured him, nothing he need do with regard to the preparations.

"We've taken all the burden off your

shoulders. We're grateful to you for the idea."

Tom Lacey flirted the steering wheel to avoid a depression, and shook off the thought of Daggett's hustling self-importance. There was this one thing that he could do without the help of any committee—this search for the missing medicine pouch up there where John Cut-Hand had hidden and left it at the time of his escape.

He gazed about him with faint stirrings of recollection. He had come this way once, he now remembered, with John Cut-Hand and the Indian village, trailing the buffalo, north and west. They had swung down off the bench through this same coulee. Vividly he recalled that so different pilgrimage. Dust and noise and color and confusion! The garrulous squaws on foot beside the loaded, bumping travoises. The warriors riding, dignified and silent, by themselves. He and John Cut-Hand and the other Indian youths racing ahead on their spotted ponies, darting off in pursuit of a frantic coyote, laughing, shouting, galloping like the wind.

He thought of the evenings when the lodges were pitched and dusk had stolen over the prairie. The circle of warriors about the lodge-fire, smoking, laughing, boasting. He and John Cut-Hand in the shadows behind the elders, listening to mighty tales of prowess—horse-stealing raids among the Crows and Piegans, cruel acts of vengeance visited upon one's enemies, and the testimony of scalps themselves held up before admiring eyes. Tales of wrongs done by superior strength and righted by superior cunning. The single shot from the long grass—the ambush in the mountains.

He thought of the crime for which John Cut-Hand had been apprehended. An exploit worthy of the son of Curly Wolf, the Blackfoot chief. There was something for Daggett to make a speech about if he could only understand it. The tragedy of the Indian. The self-interest of one race clashing with another. The weaker going down, despoiled, debased by its very contact with the other. Heroic so long as it fought back stoutly. Ignoble only when, with spirit broken, it submitted to dominance and embraced an alien code of conduct.

HE MUST be getting old, Tom Lacey decided. Even this search for the medicine pouch had somehow flattened out. There had been less adventure about it than he had expected. The Shining Mountains had changed in forty years.

He had found no mere trail but an automobile road twisting into Bloody Rock Canyon, with a snug ranger station nestling in the cirque at the upper end. He had passed and repassed the range in a single day, on a borrowed horse, following easily a fire-patrol trail that went within a stone's throw of the spot where John Cut-Hand had nursed his big blond comrade through the winter. Even the search, once he was on the spot, had been over quickly. There was the beetling wall of rock with the red band across its face, as John Cut-Hand had described it. And there at the base was the shallow cave with the narrow crevice at the inner, upper end.

He had tingled for a moment with the thrill of discovery as he drew the pouch carefully from its long resting place. Forty years since John Cut-Hand had brought it with him from the prison; forty years since he had thrust it in here away from prying eyes. The leather was stained and dry and brittle, the ornaments faded. The little hawkshells and empty cartridge-cases on its fringed ends were green with verdigris, but as he wrapped it carefully in a bit of old slicker, they still tinkled faintly.

It was natural that John Cut-Hand should prize it dearly, should want it with him in his last resting-place. Tom Lacey remembered the pride with which the Indian youth had first shown it to him, remembered even the worthless trinkets it contained. Little tokens of prowess—curious symbols.

As he dipped down off the bench at the end of his journey, Big Coulee in the

valley below him seemed curiously deserted. No life or movement in the streets. No automobiles parked slantwise down the middle of Front Street pavement. In the shimmering heat of mid-afternoon the outlines of stores and houses were wavy, indistinct. He could almost see the town as it had been when he had first come here—when Front Street was a huddle of log warehouses, stores and saloons fronting the old levee; when bearded men, booted, flannel-shirted, lounged in the shade of the rude buildings, talking of the placers in Alder Gulch, of the disaster on the Little Big Horn, of the herds of cattle being driven up from Texas, instead of this chatter of increased bank clearings and the price of wheat. When Blackfoot lodges clustered beneath the old council cottonwood across the river.

Across the river. There was confusion aplenty over there now, like a herd of buffalo stampeding. That was where every one had gone. Tom Lacey peered into the cloud of dust slowly settling down on the bunch-grass and sagebrush.

He rattled through the town, crossed Front Street, and halted uncertainly halfway across the bridge. He could make out readily, now, the dense swarm of cars parked on the flat where the road ended and the crowd had been forced to go on foot through the rough land along the river. All this fuss and bother that he had hoped would be all over by the time of his return.

A fresh cloud of dust slowly mounted from behind the shoulder of hill which hid the cottonwood from him. The strains of a band playing some curious, unfamiliar tune with a slow, throbbing pulse, like that of Blackfoot war-drums, came faintly to him. That dust must come from the school-children, trained for the occasion, doing their war-dance about John Cut-Hand's bier.

He drove on and presently parked his car among the others. It should be almost over now. Whatever Daggett had found to say must be almost finished.

He plodded along the dusty trail the crowd had followed, the oilcloth parcel under his arm sticky with heat and faintly odorous. Daggett's voice came to him faintly now, rising and falling with the periods of his speech. A little flurry of hand-clapping arose and subsided quickly as the discourse continued.

Now Daggett himself was visible, head reared back, arm extended, standing on a bunting-draped platform provided with a microphone and a table with a glass and a water pitcher. And now the whole scene beneath the cottonwood came into view—the school-children in costumes of sleazy yellow cloth decked out with dyed chicken feathers, seated in a restless, dusty circle about the tree; the town dignitaries, solemn-faced, important, on folding chairs upon the platform back of Daggett; the hot, dusty mass of people, shifting from one foot to the other but listening intently; three photographers with cameras on tripods; a little commotion off at the edge of the crowd where the town marshal quieted a drunken loafer bent upon the execution of a little war-dance of his own.

It was somehow worse than Tom Lacey had expected. A sudden revulsion, a curious feeling of sacrilege, seized him. What right had they to do all this? He raised his eyes to the huddle of poles in the tree-crotch. John Cut-Hand was already there, quiet and peaceful, wrapped in an old moth-eaten buffalo robe. The block and tackle, used for hoisting, still hung from one of the higher boughs. The ladder up which Finch must have mounted to attend to the placing of the body still leaned against the tree.

What was that fellow Daggett saying?

"I give you, as the keynote of this man's life, the one phrase which, over and over, the accounts tell us, he repeated as they brought him back from that refuge in the mountains—from that journey in which he laid his sacrifice upon the altar of friendship—the one explanation with which he met every question of his captors as to the motive for his unselfish deed, his simple gesture back toward the spot where he had so tenderly

nurtured his comrade, and his one utterance, 'good medicine'!"

Tom Lacey started. Curious, he had never thought of that.

"His simple gesture—tenderly nurtured comrade—good medicine!"

Good medicine! The pouch, wrapped in the bit of old yellow slicker! Why hadn't he thought to open it and look? The answer, of course, among those cherished trinkets! Of course! Why need he open it and look?

Tom Lacey grinned slowly, the light of incredulous understanding slowly dawning in his eyes. Daggett had reached the high spot in his speech.

"I give you John Cut-Hand's phrase—the spirit with which our modern world is actuated—this red man's unselfish, unquestioning devotion to his friend. I give you the highest, noblest aspiration of the enlightened human race—the spirit of sacrifice and service—this old Indian's deathless phrase, 'good medicine'!"

Tom Lacey unwrapped the pouch, untied its mouth and took a step forward. Good medicine, eh? They'd see what they would see! That chesty Daggett, bowing, sitting down, catching Tom Lacey's eye suddenly with that complacent gleam—"you don't know me"!

The old rancher's impulse carried him to the platform before it subsided. And there he stood, irresolute. Why spoil Big Coulee's pleasure? Why spoil John Cut-Hand's grim joke by sharing it?

Daggett, sensing some fresh interest here, had come forward and was introducing the old rancher in the manner of a toast-master.

"Our distinguished pioneer, Mr. Thomas Lacey, John Cut-Hand's friend, has doubtless a few words to say."

Tom Lacey faced about, embarrassed.

"No, nothing to say. Just something to leave on John Cut-Hand's grave."

He turned and climbed the ladder quickly, grateful for the leaves that partly screened him. He thrust his hand into the fringed and beaded bag. They were all there, as he remembered them, those little tokens of prowess—curious symbols—the arrowhead with which John Cut-Hand had shot his first buffalo, his grandfather's war-whistle made of the wing-bone of an eagle, an empty forty-four caliber cartridge. Tom Lacey did not remember this last. It must have been added later—the cartridge, no doubt, whose bullet had evened the score with the cow-puncher.

Something more, surely. Daggett's words were still ringing in his ears.

"The simple gesture—the words 'good medicine'!"

He felt again in the recesses of the bag, and now his hand encountered the object he expected. It felt like a hank of old, dry, crackling tow. He drew it partly out into the sunlight. It looked, too, like a hank of tow, tawny, curiously gummed together at one end.

He listened to the chatter of voices beneath him. They were waiting for him to come down. He placed the objects back in the pouch and retied the mouth securely. He fastened the pouch where it would swing above John Cut-Hand's head, a symbol—they said—of sacrifice and service, of an Indian's devotion to a friend who had struck him once, back there in prison; to a big, brutish, blond man whose hair, prison-cropped when he came on a travois to the mountains, had grown long and matted before he died one night of a sudden sickness John Cut-Hand had not named!

Tom Lacey wiped his face clean of expression, and came back down the ladder. He stifled the gleam in his eyes and the lift of pride in his shoulders, so that Big Coulee might not know.

And Big Coulee will never know unless she climbs the tree and chases away the greedy magpies. Unless she braves the grisly horrors of that torn and ravaged bundle, and seeks for herself in the old pouch tinkling above its head. There she will find the part of John Cut-Hand's story that is neither open nor ignoble—a fine blond scalp, carefully nurtured throughout the winter and duly harvested in the spring when it was decently long enough to take.

# *Tramp Printer's Old Wandersong*

## by N. SUYDAM COWLEY

DON'T care how short a string I make tonight;
Don't care if thinspace gobbles all the phat,
For there's a freight goes through at half past three,
And, if I've luck, I'll be on board of that,
Clutching the rods and watching daylight grow
As she roars down the pass to Indio.

Tonight the boss has offered me more pay.
I wonder if he thinks I'll stay for pay
In this quiet town all filled with little homes
As like as em quads, when the long, strange way,
Is calling, calling in the springtime when
A restlessness stirs even home-chained men.

Next week I won't be throwing in my case,
But in a side-door Pullman pounding on
Past dunes smoothed by the fingers of the wind,
Great pillar cactus black against the dawn,
The Colorado on its sullen way,
Its ripples looking as if made in clay.

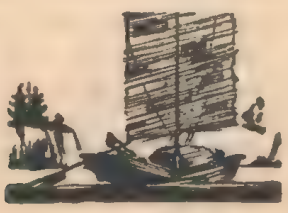
I'll see the bullfight's glitt'ring, Old World pomp,
The swift sword of the gold-decked matador,
The Juarez' market, and the Alamo,
Where Crockett died upon the bloodsoaked floor,
And Galveston, where waiting ships swing wide
Beneath all flags, upon the restless tide.

Whichever way Fate rolls the dice for me,
From there I'll go to some place strange and new.
Perhaps where fogs hang thick around the bergs,
Or where pearl-divers slip from the canoe,
Or crumbling cities in the jungle lie,
Or camels sway against the desert sky.

My mother says she saw the broad moon rise
The night that I was born. For all her pain,
She thought of trails up where the great pines sing,
Of cañon trails, of trails across the plain;
All she had ridden or had longed to ride,
And, through her moans, she heard the calling tide.

And so, no matter how I like a place,
Or longed for it when half a world away,
Soon something wakes my restlessness again,
There comes a call that will not let me stay.
Not even though Love whispers choked and low,
"Oh, sweet, I can not, can not let you go!"

Nothing can keep me while the great winds call,
And strange tales pass along from man to man,
And ships go out to dare the plunging seas,
And wind-blown sands the long armed caravan.
All lands are found, but still the spirit stirs
That sent the New World her adventurers.



# Men Make

## *A Mystery Aboard a China Smuggler-Ship*

"I'LL TAKE you out of here if you say the word," said Howell, when the boy had set down our warm beer. "You're not much good, maybe, but you're a white man and you've got sense. You shouldn't be pounding the piano in this —— joint."

"Thanks," I said dryly. "How'll you take me?"

"Supercargo on that hooker of mine. I need some one I can trust."

That struck me funny, and no wonder. I laughed at it. Trust! Trust a piano-pounder picked up in Hung Charley's place!

Port Balik was not like an American oil town, being on the Celebes coast, but there was a lot of flamdoodle to it just the same. It was a roaring place. Oil men from all over the world were there, and rigs steadily pushing up the valley and over the hills; the dredged harbor always had ships lying at anchor; Chinese and Arab traders had flocked in, and the place was wide open—clear beyond any Dutch authority—and run chiefly by the oil company, where any law and order were concerned.

How I was there, dead broke and on the beach, does not matter. I was there, pounding the old tinpan in Hung Charley's joint, for my bed and board. Oil men work hard and play hard, and there was no romantic illusion about Hung Charley's place, believe me! It was bad. Howell was bad, too. He was no angel.

His old Chinese-owned tinpot had been in harbor three days, and I had heard of him. I think he was Welsh, originally—small, dark, vibrant as a flame. A thin and bitter man with a kick in each fist and a reputation for brutality, but said to be on the square in most ways. Not where laws were concerned, but where squareness counted—man to man.

"What you thinking over, Browne?" he snapped, his cold gray eyes biting into me. "Afraid to ship with me, you big strapping piano-pounder?"

I smiled into his hard gaze and shook my head.

"Not particularly," I said. "Why would you pick me to trust?"

"Because Hung says you're on the level."

"Well," I said. "Trust me, then."

He laughed at that.

"Right!" he said briskly. "I'm one-third owner of this blasted *Wung Chow* of mine; the Toy Low Company in Canton, two-thirds. They've got a *comprador* aboard. I want one o' my own. I'm taking on some cargo before dawn tomorrow morning that will need checking. I'm not sure of my men by a long shot. My gang got about wiped out with the cholera down at Macassar and I had to ship a bad crew. We go out with the tide to-night. What say?"

"Well," I said, "I'd say there was something queer in the wind, if you're sailing to-night and taking on cargo before morning."

# Mistakes

## A Complete Novelette

BY

## H. BEDFORD-JONES

"Good for you!" he said, and chuckled. He had bright, sharp eyes, like those of a bird. "The lord hates a fool and so do I. When will you be aboard?"

"By five o'clock—in an hour," I said.

"Good," he nodded. "I'll have clearance by then and will meet you at the jetty."

He drank his beer, made a face, flung down a coin and went swaggering off. Like many small men, he had a pronounced swagger, as if wearing a chip on his shoulder. It was no bluff with Howell, either.

Only after he was gone did I recall that we had not discussed wages, nor did I know whither the blessed *Wung Chow* was bound. Not that it mattered much to me! Any port in a storm for Jimmy Brown, strictly on his uppers and on the beach.

AT FIVE that afternoon I was on the jetty with my few possessions, looking down at the four men in the waiting boat. I thought I had seen some hard specimens in Port Balik, but these four slant-eyed devils loafing in the afternoon sunlight could have given cards and spades to the whole Port Balik crowd. Not in any definite fashion either; merely in their manner, their faces, their whole bearing.

Orientals are deceptive, of course, to western eyes; the sleek, smiling, gentlemanly little Malay gives no hint that he may run wild with a knife at any moment. With these four, however, there was no mistake. They were thoroughly bad. I began to appreciate what lay behind Howell's words regarding the crew he had been forced to ship down south; I might have known there was a joker in the business somewhere. Because I was husky and Hung Charley answered for me, Howell wanted me along as company.

"All set, Browne? Good lad. Look alive, down there!"

Howell had come—brisk, chipper, swaggering, but silent. One read his abounding personality and vigor in his very walk; he seemed to be on softly flowing steel springs. A boy followed with some bundles and tossed them down, took his pay and padded off. I got into the stern of the boat, Howell beside me, and we set off on the mile run down to the anchorage. Port Balik allows only the oil tankers up to the jetty, as you probably know, because of the lack of space. Other craft have to anchor below, off the river-mouth.

"How do you like my gentry?" said Howell, with a flirt of his hand toward the rowers.

"They handle their oars," I said dryly. "I see why you wanted me along."

He laughed at that.

"You're a sharp 'un, Browne!" he said. "Anything else you see?"

"One or two things—such as the lack of formality in signing me on."

He nodded.

"Hung was right about you. We're off on a lark, savvy? After we leave here, anything goes. Anything may happen. Now's your last chance if you want to back out. I should have been a bit more plain, I expect."

"I haven't any reverse gear," I said, laughing. "—— man, I don't care what happens! I've been knocking about for six months, and I get a kick out of it all."

He gave me a queer look, almost envious.

"Husky young beggar!" he said. "Well, when you get to be my age you'll sheer off all the privations possible. Get your fill of hardship before thirty—either go under or be able to enjoy your ease by contrast with the past—learn the lesson! Life's all a lesson anyhow. I'm to be learning one of my own in a day or two."

"If you know that," I said with intuitive shrewdness, "either you're a fool to go on with it, or you like lessons despite your talk of sheering off."

His bird-like glance rested on me a moment. Then he threw back his head and laughed silently, and I saw the four slant-eyed men staring at him over their oars.

"You're a good 'un, Browne!" he exclaimed. "You've struck it. I like lessons; that is, I like to give 'em. I'm going to give a pretty stiff one this trip, if my suspicions work our right. They usually do. I'm not quite a fool. We may pay heavy, but that's part of the lesson I'll have to learn myself. You'll have to learn it, too—"

His words fogged out, and I wondered what was behind it all.

Not that I wasted much wonder on the cargo we were to take aboard that night. Howell had hinted at this plainly enough. In Dutch territorial waters, with British and French and Japanese territory scattered here and there, not to mention the Philippines, it was not so much a question of licit or illicit cargo, as of just what kind of contraband it might be. The laws against too free trading are pretty stiff out in those parts, and cover a multitude of sins; we might be going to take aboard anything from gold to girls, opium to hard camphor.

Our boat drew down upon the *Wung Chow*, who lay swinging to the flooding tide with a lazy curl of smoke from her single funnel. She was not pretty, and she was not large, but she was fairly clean —a little, old, well-decked ruin of a ship, with yellow faces looking down at us over the rail.

"No lascars?" I said to Howell. He shrugged.

"No chance, worse luck! The steward and the chief are my old ones—the rest all gone. We had a tough time with that cholera. Well, get along up."

I wondered why he did not mention his other officers, but I saw soon enough.

The tide would not go out for a couple of hours, so there was no great rush about anything. Howell showed me to a small cabin—the disinfection had been thorough, of course—and in another half-hour I walked into the mess-cabin to find Howell there alone. The steward came in as we sat down, a round-faced, cheerful little man who grinned pleasantly at me. His name was Li.

"Where's that *comprador*, Sing?" demanded Howell. The steward grimaced.

"Sing, him velly sick," he returned. "No talkee, velly hot."

"Not cholera?" snapped Howell. The steward merely shook his head. He was obviously a privileged rascal. "Mr. Johnson broke into my locker this afternoon and took that brandy, didn't he? I suppose he's drunk now?"

"Velly dlunk, sir," said Li calmly.

"You be ready to take Sing's place tonight, and check off that stuff when it comes aboard," said Howell.

Another man came in and was introduced to me as the second officer. He was named McGregor, but was far from that; a sleek, timid, little, golden-skinned Eurasian. I must have looked my astonishment, for Howell laughed, in his silent, grim fashion, but vouchsafed no explanation. Then the atmosphere cleared like blowing weather as Stuart, the chief, came in with a cheerful bluster.

"Glad to meet you," he said, giving me a hearty handshake, a grin on his wrinkled, bluff countenance. "I expect you know you're on a queer ship? Well, I'll say no more, but if those engines hold together to Canton, I'll be fair amazed! When I'm off watch, those fool Chinese assistants of mine are liable to fill the oil-cups with water. That's about what they know. How's everything, Cap'n?"

"Promising," said Howell, and we settled down to our meal.

Promising as to what? I wondered. A mate who was "velly dlunk", a second officer who looked like a sing-song girl, a crew of the vilest Chinese I ever laid eyes on and unlawful occasions ahead!

Later, Howell took me up to the bridge and gave me a cheroot.

"Ever kill a man, Browne?" he asked abruptly. I hesitated, but told the truth.

"San Francisco."

"What about?"

"Words!" I said, bitterly. "The great childish American fetish, having to do the 'right thing'—save the mark!"

He caught my meaning and laughed in the darkness.

"Right. You've discovered one of the great truths about life," he said after a silent moment. "The smaller, pettier, dirtier a man is, the more he resents any imputation on his honor, and the more important words appear to him. The less honor he has, the touchier he is about it. The bigger a man is, inside himself, the more he realizes that words are only wind after all; the viler they are, the more amusing. You can gage the bigness of a man by the importance he attaches to an epithet."

"Supercargo's instructions?" I queried, amused.

"Aye. Feeling you out—better satisfied all the time. Here, take this, and two extra clips. All full." He passed me an automatic pistol and the clips, and I pocketed them. He watched to see how I did it, and chuckled. "No hip-pocket ideas, eh? Right-o! Anything you'd like explained?"

"Mr. McGregor," I said.

He really laughed at this.

"Don't blame you, Browne! That sleek cat is some relative of the firm. He's one of the few men alive who look exactly what they are. I fancy he's behind whatever's going on to-night. He and I arranged for the cargo at Macassar. Now, then, use your head! Why is Johnson drunk and laid out for the night? Why's the *comprador* sick?"

"Honest men," I said. He took my arm.

"Right. Let's go have a look at Sing."

We went, we had our look and found the man dying, senseless, beyond speech. It was no ordinary sickness.

"Obviously," said Howell to me, "the steward poisoned him—eh? But the obvious is seldom true, except for fools. I'm no fool. Li's the best man aboard here, except Stuart. Well, we're swinging around. Tide's on the ebb. You'd best stay on the bridge."

I intended to do just that.

Ten minutes later the winches were rattling and banging away, the hook was climbing up from the mud, and the *Wung Chow* was heading for sea.

## II

THERE was no doubt that Howell had let me in for something, but not unwarned. The more I saw of the little skipper, the better I liked him. He had a steward, an engineer, and me—nobody else to trust, and the deuce to pay.

It seemed rather ridiculous about the paying, but the *comprador* died as we were puffing out to sea, and Howell had him buried quickly, without formalities. This brought the horns and hoofs home to us. I stood at the bridge-rail for a time, then found a deck-chair and took the darkness comfortably, and reflected. I did not know everything, but I could guess at some things. That *comprador* had been poisoned today, in such a way that he could not speak again. What had he found out, that he must be put out of the way before he could tell it to Howell?

A queer business all around.

The old hooker steamed steadily out and away, the riding-lights and harbor lights of Port Balik fell away and were swallowed up, and we were out at sea—cool, starlit, serene. Presently there was a little stir forward, and I saw two lanterns, both red, appear in the bows. Search as I would, however, there was no other light visible ahead. Only the sea and the dark uplift of the hills to port.

"Better turn in," said Howell, coming toward me from the pilot house. "No telling when the other craft will turn up. Perhaps not until toward morning."

"Doesn't your mate ever show up when the ship gets out to sea?" I asked.

"Hm!" he said. "Old Johnson would, yes—but he won't. That bottle he helped himself to must have had a dose out of the same flask that fixed poor Sing."

A stiff jolt, this. I merely said good night and went to my own cabin, thinking a few thoughts as I went. No need to ask Howell if he and the chief were taking care of themselves. I could read, in every word and tone he had uttered, an unspoken, but grim, assurance and warning. Something doing—and that sleek second mate behind it!

I locked my door before turning in that night, and hid the pistol to boot.

Trampling of feet, shrill Chinese voices, the stoppage of thrumming engines—these things wakened me, sent me piling into my clothes. It was three o'clock, still all dark outside. I slipped into my jacket, pocketed the pistol again and went outside.

Starlight through a thin haze, no moon, a ship's lights fifty yards off to starboard. Two red lanterns in her bows, also, that flickered out a moment later. A Chinese voice was hailing us, and another made reply from the bridge. Then I heard Howell's crisp accents.

"Mr. McGregor! Ask if they've got the stuff aboard for me, as well as your lot."

The second officer put the query in Chinese and received a spattering reply in the same tongue.

"Aye, sir," he said to Howell in English. "All of it as contracted."

"Blast your muddy eyes! What was that he said about a girl!" snapped Howell. "You fool! Think I don't savvy Cantonese? Spit it out quick!"

The mate was too frightened to lie, as the swift shrillness of his answer tokened.

"A woman came in charge of the shipment, sir. That's all they know."

"Tell them to send her over and be quick about it. Mr. Browne, be ready to check the cases that come aboard to the hatch aft! Never mind the stowage; Mr. McGregor will see to that. If any cases are broken, pitch 'em overboard and mark 'em off. I'll see to the No. 1 hold—you ready down there, Sing?"

"Aye, Cap'n," came the steward's voice from the well-deck forward.

I stayed where I was. Howell had said to be ready, not to go below, and I was alert for such distinctions from him. Besides, there was no rush, for flares were being broken out and cargo would not come aboard soon. We had no searchlight, and no radio; I think the old hooker just came under the thousand-ton radio regulations. McGregor put out the ladder and then vanished aft, while Howell leaned over the rail and snapped orders at the men forward. I saw Stuart down there to handle the winches, as the lights broke out.

The two ships were drawing closer together; there was not even a groundswell, and they could come rail to rail without danger. It was a slow business, however, and a boat was coming over from the other craft. I was scarcely aware of it until she was under our ladder and an unfamiliar figure was mounting to the bridge—a woman.

"Captain Howell?" came her voice, as she came up to us in the darkness. It was a cool and self-contained voice, softly modulated and yet reaching. "I'm Miss Lui Tock. My father was taken suddenly ill and I came with the shipment at the last moment."

"Humph! Glad to meet you," said the skipper, tone belying words lustily

enough. "Going back to S'pore with your craft, I suppose?"

"No, I'm going on to Kwangtung with you," said Miss Lui.

"You'd better not. It's no joy trip!" said Howell. She laughed softly, a clear and whimsical little laugh.

"I'm forced to act as agent for my father and the company, Captain." By her use of this word, I knew she had learned her English in America. An English-trained person would not have used the title alone. "There's too much at stake, you see. I have to do everything from paying you to making collection at the other end. I've brought along a small shipment of bullion, too, being sent north."

"Oh!" said the skipper in a queer voice. "Oh! That explains it, then. Not a soul knew about your bullion, I suppose?"

"It's no secret, except from government," she replied. "Of course, no one knew that your ship was involved."

"Oh, not at all!" Howell was trying to be sarcastic. "My mate died half an hour ago, my supercargo died last night; cholera wiped out most of my crew and I had to replace 'em at Macassar. Fortunately or not, Mr. McGregor of the general offices was in Macassar, and he has a mate's ticket, so I pressed him into service. He's acting mate. You know him?"

"Yes," said she.

It was a still, small word, if you get my meaning; the very restraint in it made it bulk large in the darkness. That woman spoke volumes in the one word. I think it startled Howell, tempted him toward explanations; but there was no time to waste. The other craft was alongside. Bumpers were out, lines passed, voices chattering. The skipper had to make up his mind quickly.

"You'd better not go with us," he said. "You can leave things to me safely; for you, it's not safe at all."

"We trust you perfectly," she returned. "But I must go. There are things to do when we reach Kwangtung."

"*If*, not *when!*" said Howell. "You're determined?"

"Certainly," she returned. "Now, here are the papers. I've arranged everything, as you cabled. The shipment which Mr. McGregor took on will come aboard separately; that sent by your agent in Singapore is in our forward hold—separate invoices. I have the bullion in two suitcases. It's in my boat now."

"Order it up," said Howell.

He turned to me, and listened a moment as the woman went to the rail and called down. His hand fell on my arm.

"Sing's cabin has been thoroughly cleaned out," he said quietly. "It's number five. You'll find it in shape for her. Tell her I'll send bedding as soon as we're off. Old Li's pretty busy just now. Then get aft to your job. Here's the invoice."

It was, of course, not sheer chance alone which gave her the cabin of the late *comprador*. Those things are never sheer chance; they reach out and back and around in ever-widening circles. There's nothing so vast and terrible in the world as the causes of things, the tiny trifling causes reaching back to greater causes, reaching out ahead with effect after effect. Moses and Luther Burbank alike knew it, as their works show, but most of us disregard these things.

So with Miss Lui Tock's being given this cabin. If Mr. Johnson had died and been buried first, she would have taken his quarters, and all would have been changed. But she didn't; and there we were.

Howell introduced me to her, said he'd get her bullion in the safe first thing in the morning, and I went down with her and met the porters, and took her along to the cabin. When I switched on the light, I saw it was spick and span. The two grips were put in, and I had my first look at her. It was an eye-opener.

Why her voice had made me think of a honey blonde, I don't know, but it had. Nothing of the sort; she was short, dark, wore tailored tussore silk of light tan; her face was quite arresting, for it was

scarcely Chinese at all. Under the dark, braided masses of hair her eyes were heavy-lidded, masterful, shrewd. She was pretty enough, and emanated that indefinable quality we call sex-appeal. Another word for character, I suppose. She was extremely feminine, but not annoyingly so. I put her down as perhaps two and twenty. She had been looking me over with the same curiosity, and now put out her hand, oddly.

"Thank you, Mr. Browne. I'm glad to find you aboard. If anything goes wrong, please have me called; but I think there's no need. Good night!"

"Good night!" I said, and departed.

Why the deuce, I wondered, was she glad to find me aboard? She spoke as if I had been an old friend, yet certainly she had never heard of me in her life, before tonight. It made me laugh to myself, the oddity of it all.

I got aft, descended to the well-deck, and found the work starting. The other craft, a good bit larger than the *Wung Chow*, was lined up alongside and her winches were beginning to rattle away merrily. So far as I could see, her crew was all Chinese. Probably Straits Chinese, like the girl—that name of Tock was a certainty.

A long cargo boom began swinging large, heavy cases the size of a piano box over to our deck; our tackle picked them up and lowered them into the hold. Stuart was up forward, and two of his Chinese were at the winches here, with McGregor commanding them somewhere in the darkness, behind the flare which was lighting our well-deck.

The invoice was made out both in English and Chinese. Every case had a number, also in both languages, painted front and back, and they had to be checked off on the invoice. It was simple enough. There were only thirty-two of them in all, and they could not be handled very quickly because of the care necessary in adjusting the slings. There was no occasion to obey the skipper's orders and heave any overboard; all were perfect.

Twenty-eight of the big cases had gone down. The next came over, and our men hooked the slings on our boom—that of the other craft would not reach—and it rose as our winch clanked away. Here again was accident or chance or destiny; I chose that instant to look up, for no particular reason, and actually saw the cable beginning to slack and run backward as the case was over me. I have no recollection to this day of the muscular action, but it must have been spasmodic, instinctive, due to every sense being alert. At all events I went over sidewise and rolled into the shadows.

It must have been frightfully close. Even before I struck the deck, I could hear the crash of the falling case. Relization of the peril stunned me for an instant, then, as I came to my feet, something hurtled through the air and thudded on the deck in front of the yellow flare. It was the Chinese who had been at the winch. He crawled up, and as he did so, Howell was down alongside him in a flying leap, and cursing. He flayed McGregor and the yellow men with his tongue, and flayed them properly in everything from Dutch to Cantonese. Then he saw me coming along.

"Hurt, Browne?" he snapped.

"No, it isn't damaged a particle," I said, looking at the packing case. He stared at me for a moment, then chuckled.

"Watch your step, you poor innocent!" he said, and was gone.

That was all. Not until the case was in the air again and heading for the hatchway did I actually comprehend that this was no accident. Then I lolled back against the deck-house and lighted a cigaret to hide my nervousness. I was nervous, all right, after it was over. Was it McGregor, up above at the winch, or was it that yellow —— dragging himself away with a split scalp? Or both of them?

No matter; it was over now, and I had learned my lesson. And how the skipper had showed up when least expected; how that Chinaman had been smashed down. All luck, of course, but luck's only a name for strange things, strange coordinations we don't rightly fathom.

Nothing else happened. The last case came over and went down. Booms and tackle were stowed; the men came up from below. McGregor passed me, catlike, and began getting the hatch-cover in place and the wedges knocked home. I went up to the bridge, and found the work forward was just completed also. There were no farewells. The lines were cast off, the engines rumbled, and the two ships headed away from each other over the glassy sea. The lights died.

Howell loomed up beside me with a sharp word. I handed him the invoice.

"All correct, sir. No damage."

"Wasn't their fault," he said. "—— you, watch yourself! I can't play nursemaid all voyage. What'd I give you that gun for, you idiot? Shoot first and talk after. Better make a mistake than let the other chap make one. It's gone off well, very well; all stowed safe, the horizon clear, no suspicion—good! Get to sleep. See you today sometime."

Dawn was coming into the sky, and we were heading north toward China.

## III

IT WAS nearly noon when I turned out and found the old hooker wallowing along with no land in sight and a brisk windy sea tossing her through the sunlight, northward. Out on deck I encountered the yellow chap whose head was split, but he seemed to be quite oblivious of me. So did the rest of the crew, except the steward. They all knew, of course, that I had no actual standing as an officer. The mate, Mr. Johnson, I found, had been buried that morning.

Captain Howell, Stuart, Miss Lui Tock and I messed alone, which was pleasant enough. She was a bright one, that girl. Had been to college in America, too, and had twice the brains of most men you'd meet. She was from Singapore, it proved.

I was curious to know about this cargo of ours. It was easy to figure that she had brought it from Singapore in the other craft; and from her words with Howell when she came abroad, I knew we were taking it to Canton or parts adjacent. But why? Why should two ships do the work of one, in an extra third of the time involved.

Undoubtedly Howell scented my curiosity, and so perhaps did Stuart, who had a Scot's burr but no real accent, and was a bluff, likeable man. At all events, I was soon given more than an inkling of the whole business.

"I'll tell ye what," Stuart led off solemnly, "I'll not be turning up my nose at a bit of silver, but there's one or two things I'd not do for any money."

"What—piracy?" asked Miss Lui, with a laugh. Stuart inspected her stolidly.

"No, miss, there's worse than piracy, and that's running guns to the Bolshevik crowd in Kwangtung! I'd have no hand in such work. It's unchristian, it's going against nature."

"Bosh!" said Howell. "You were filibustering in North China two years ago!"

"That's different," said the chief. "I'm talking about running guns to the Canton Reds. Why, they've got Russians officering their army, I hear! Aye, red Bolsheviks from Moscow."

Miss Lui leaned forward. Behind her glinting dark eyes was a trace of earnestness.

"You're not a Bolshevik, Mr. Stuart?"

"Heaven forbid!" he asserted. Yet I saw Howell's eyes twinkle.

"And you're not a Chinaman either," said the girl, looking at him steadily. "But you have sense, Mr. Stuart. You know the situation in China today. Why have the Cantonese absorbed all of southern China until they're reaching out for Shanghai and Pekin? Not because they have Russian officers! The northern armies have as many or more, even have whole Russian legions of old Tsarist veterans. Not because they can get arms overland from Siberia—the northern armies can get them from Japan, and do get them by sea from Sweden, who isn't a party to the convention."

"Well?" said Stuart dryly. "Why, then?"

"Because they've got something to fight for," said the girl briskly. "I'm no Bolshevik, but I'm Chinese, and there are millions like me. For thousands of years we've had a symbol to fight for, an emperor. We got a republic, and lost all cohesion, because liberty is only a name; under liberty, we've had tyranny. All the war lords set up for themselves, or were puppets worked by strings. Then came the Red movement in Canton, and it can't be beaten! Not because it's red—that's mostly propaganda, mind—but because it's simply a cause to fight for. A symbol!"

Stuart opened his mouth to protest, but Howell broke in with a laugh.

"Right! Let's cut politics out. You're dead right, Miss Lui. The chief here has been drinking in all the pap that was fed him. Whew! Regular old war stuff, isn't it? Going all over the world, too. Well, the old world will wake up some day. Meantime, what's going on behind the arms convention? Rankest sort of rot. Everybody's running arms to their friends, and trying to stop any being run elsewhere, and that's the truth."

"Who'd stop us?" I queried. Howell gave me a grin.

"Anybody, my son, anybody—we're not protected! We're not running 'em for the Japs, the British, or the French. Merely for ourselves and for the Chinese. And that's the worst sort of crime! Ethics be hanged. Miss Lui, or rather her father, is paying to have one lot of stuff shipped; I've bought the other lot, chiefly machine guns, and am shipping it on my own, and my chief interest lies in getting paid."

"Aye," said Stuart, giving him a shrewd look. "To let Chinese use them against white folks, aye!"

"Bosh!" I said. "Bosh, and you know it, chief! The only crowd who have any possible ethics are the Chinese. After all, it's their country."

"Ye're a fool," said Stuart dourly, and rose and went out.

"Yes, I'm afraid you're a fool, Browne," said the skipper cheerfully, with a wink at Miss Lui. "There's the only logical standpoint in the China affair. Everybody who doesn't agree is a fool."

She laughed, and it was a nice laugh to hear, ringing and musical.

"Quite correct, Captain! Do you think we'll be searched?"

Howell shook his head.

"Safe as a church, Miss Lui. All the available warships are up at Hankow, Canton, or other points that way, or else in a hurry to get there. If you made arrangements as I had cabled your father—"

"Exactly as you cabled," she broke in. "Two days before I left Singapore we had a radio from our friends in Canton. You'll be met at the point desired."

"Then forget any danger from that source," said Howell decisively. Miss Lui leaned her head to one side and looked at him.

"Hm! Are there other sources?"

"Look at this crew of mine and you'd think so," said Howell. "My mate gone; good old Sing gone, new men from stokehold to quartermasters—huh! If they've got wind of your bullion, then stand by for trouble. You've never seen piracy, have you?"

She nodded.

"Yes. I was aboard the *Jade* last year. I was brought in as translator."

"We're not French," said Howell grimly, then excused himself and left.

There was food for thought in all this. The *Jade* piracy was a famous matter. It took place in February of 1926, when the French steamer was calmly seized, run into Bias Bay and frisked. No one was hurt; the thing was done with absolute precision and good humor, and a bullion shipment removed intact. The pirate chief even told the French skipper that this was their sixth job, that they operated one a year, and it paid. But, as Howell had said, we were not French. If our precious outfit started trouble, it would not be bloodless.

Nothing occurred to justify all these piratical forebodings, however. With perfect weather backing her, the *Wung*

*Chow* slithered and pounded along all that day and half the next, without incident, except that one of the Chinese forward was sick. It proved nothing bad, however.

Howell had things running like clockwork from the start, despite his short officer list. I found that we had thirteen natives aboard, including the steward Li, but this caused nobody any worry. We might have included McGregor to make fourteen, at a pinch.

"Odd how things work out, isn't it?" said Howell to me, the next evening, as we smoked on the bridge and watched the empty sea. I think he was keeping out of any steamer lane for his own reasons.

"Depends," I said. "What things?"

"Coincidences. Here Miss Lui was aboard that craft last year—the *Jade*. Well, our late *comprador* Sing was aboard her, too. He was a bank *shroff* then. There's an odd point of contact established. They turn up all the time. If we knew everything about every one aboard here, I'd wager we could establish a dozen points of contact."

I laughed.

"Especially in our ancestry—McGregor, for instance! By the way, I've been wondering why he should be suspected of anything, skipper. He arranged this shipment, didn't he? And he's in the company."

Howell only shrugged and muttered something about blasted Eurasians, then went to look at the compass. Evidently he had no definite basis for his suspicion or he would have come straight out with it before this; McGregor was too sly for him, perhaps.

THE NEXT morning was working along toward noon when I met Miss Lui out on deck, walking, and I knew right off something had happened, merely by the look of her. We passed the time of day.

"Well," I said, "what is it?"

"What is what?" she demanded, her eyes widening on me.

"That's what I want to know," I said, laughing. "You look as though you'd just seen a ghost. What's up?"

"I had a fright," she confessed, and said no more.

"Maybe," I said. "You're not the frightening kind, I should say. A rat in your cabin?"

She only dimpled up in a smile, and then turned to Captain Howell, who was coming up.

"Good morning," she responded to his greeting. "Captain, you remember we spoke about the *Jade* piracy? I told you I was the translator between the pirate chief and the French captain."

"Yes," said Howell, with a nod. "Everybody's heard about that rascal, too the cold nerve of him! What was his name—Wen something?"

"Wang Shui," she corrected. "Of the Kwangsi Wang family. By the way, the steward says that I have the cabin of your former supercargo, Sing, and that he was on the *Jade* last year, too."

"Yes," said Howell.

His birdlike gaze probed hard at her. Both he and I sensed something extraordinary in her manner, something running about and leaping excitedly beneath her cool and calm exterior.

"Have you time to come down to my cabin for a moment?" she asked, and seemed to hang on his reply.

"Why, certainly!" said Howell. "Come along, Browne. What's up, Miss Lui?"

"Perhaps my imagination—you'll see," she returned, with that queer elusive smile.

We accompanied her to the cabins beneath the bridge, and to Number Five. When she threw open the door and we entered, it showed little signs of her occupancy. She turned to Howell.

"Will you lie down on the bunk, please? The lower one."

There were two berths against the steel wall to the left. There was another sign of her American training, the fact that she took the lower berth, and not the upper one, as an Englishwoman would have done. It made me smile, at the moment.

"Lie down?" said Howell. "Why—I suppose so."

He got on the bunk, put his feet on the iron rail, and winked at me.

"All right, I'm down!" he said cheerfully. "What's next on the program? Anesthetic?"

"No, grease marks, apparently," said Miss Lui. "Look along the wall at your left and see if you can make out anything."

I looked at the white wall, and it was blank. Howell turned his head and looked. His cap fell off and he groped for it. Then his arm froze. His eyes fastened on something I could not see, and he frowned slightly. The slanting light from the port must have showed up something otherwise invisible.

"Hello! That is queer," he said. "Looks as though some beggar had made marks with his finger—Chinese writing, what? Ideographs?"

"Naturally," she returned. "Your late *comprador*, Sing, was Chinese—"

Her words trailed off, she gestured slightly, and waited. Howell whistled softly.

I stared at the wall, thrilling to the realization of it. Here was that man I had never seen except when at the point of death, that *comprador*, Sing, poisoned, probably knowing himself done for, unable to speak. He had lain in this bunk and had written words there on the wall with a greasy finger, invisible writing. Why? If he could have done that, then surely he could have left a visible message. It looked preposterous.

Howell turned his head, swung around and put his feet to the floor. His eyes were as if lighted by flashes of inner light.

"By the gods!" he said. "You know, it looks silly, dashed silly—eh? More behind it. Old Sing couldn't talk, but he could mark on the wall with his finger. He did it two or three times by the looks of things there. Why no marks? He was trying to show somebody—ah! It was Johnson! That beggar could read Chinese and speak it. He and Sing were good pals. So that's why Johnson was knocked off too? Hi there, Li! Come in here!"

The steward had just passed the open door. He came inside and grinned.

"Did Sing give you any message or try to?" demanded Howell. Li grimaced, bobbed his head, and spattered out some Cantonese. Miss Lui translated for my benefit.

"He can't read or write, and Sing couldn't talk. So Johnson came and Sing wrote words on the wall. Johnson looked excited and started to shout—he had been drinking already. Then he tried to talk with Sing. Li says he went away and left them. Johnson came forward and spoke to some of the men and then went back to his cabin."

It was rather incoherent and aimless and led us nowhere. The mate had been drinking, and that clapped a stopper on the whole business, ruined the *comprador's* dying effort, probably caused Johnson's death, too.

Howell lighted a cigaret.

"Alcohol costs a lot," he observed. "We'll never know what that message was, now— Oh! So that's it, eh? You can read that invisible writing?"

Miss Lui was smiling, and now she nodded.

"Yes. You see how things work out, fit together—how the scattered pieces dovetail? Sing was aboard the *Jade* and undoubtedly remembered those pirates. He wrote a name here on the wall. Johnson was excited and shouted it out, then questioned some of the men; they all heard him, all knew Sing had told him that name. By the time he went back to his cabin and his liquor, the poison had been slipped into it. You see?"

"Aye, miss," said Howell. "I see—all except the nubbin. What's the name?"

"Wang Shui. The leader of the *Jade* piracy. He's probably aboard here with his men and Sing had recognized him."

## IV

IF MISS LUI was playing for dramatic effect, she sure got it.

Unless you had been out in those waters, you might miss the point. For a

year or so, every one in the east had been talking of Wang Shui. After taking the *Jade*, Wang Shui and his men had talked coolly enough about their past exploits, even naming two of their former prizes, the *Ling Chow* and the *Fung Wah*.* Then, although fully known, they had dropped clear out of sight with their loot.

Their program of one ship a year, their entire precision about the job, their cool nerve and assurance, all combined to lend Wang Shui's outfit a halo of romance, and strictly business-like romance, too. They were efficient rascals, and efficiency is so rare as to usually bring a halo of some kind. The many Chinese-owned ships, which carried only enough British officers to get Hong Kong registration, were so worked up about it that they had nearly come to comply with the Piracy Regulations—almost, but not quite. Every one in the Far East was conjecturing about where and when Wang Shui would fall on his next victim.

Naturally, the notion that he was aboard us with his gang was like a bombshell. We had an illicit cargo which would preclude our going into any port or getting aid from any other ship, short of extreme distress. Further, that cargo was as good as ready money when landed in any Chinese port; item, Miss Lui had brought along a lot of bullion, probably contributions to the Cantonese cause, collected in Singapore. It had to be gold, for the mad wars and rumors of wars in China had knocked out banking systems. All in all, the *Wung Chow* was made to order for Wang Shui and his gang. And if it was his gang which had come aboard at Macassar, we were just naturally out of luck.

I could see all this fitting through Howell's brain as he sat there and stared up at us. He was thinking ahead, though.

"It's conjecture," he said, shooting out the words crisply. "Belshazzar had nothing on us when it came to writing on the wall, but he had a lot more to go on. Supposing our conjecture is true and Wang Shui is aboard—eh? Supposing these grease marks mean just that. Easy enough to prove! You say you've seen him and talked with him, Miss Lui?"

"Yes. A man one wouldn't forget," she said. None the less, she was smiling a little as if she knew just what the skipper was driving at. And she did.

"Well, it's simple," said Howell. "We'll call all hands for medical inspection. You take a look at every man aboard. If Wang is one of them, I'll put a bullet into him then and there, and end the trouble."

"Very simple, yes, but life's never simple as it looks," she said, with her odd little touch of Chinese philosophy or whatever you like to call it. "I've seen all your seamen, and he's not one of them."

"Then he's in the black gang," said Howell with conviction.

"I was down looking at the engines when watches were changed at eight o'clock this morning," she said quietly. "He wasn't there."

Howell grimaced. "——! Excuse me, miss. I didn't mean to say that. By George, when did you pick up this handwriting on the wall?"

"Early this morning." She dimpled up, enjoying his aggressively startled air. "I went right to work, saw the men forward before the watch was changed, saw them afterward, and saw the engine-room gang at the change."

"There's a sick man forward," said Howell. "He's a thin, wispy chap, looks about sixty or more, has a gray pigtail, for a wonder. Looks very delicate. See him?"

She shook her head, still smiling.

"No need, after that description. Wang Shui was large, heavily built, young rather than old, and had nothing delicate about him. He may be stowed away somewhere."

Howell came to his feet, caught his cap, and was gone through the doorway, all in one steel-spring movement, it seemed. I looked at Miss Lui, she looked at me, and we both broke into a laugh.

"Nothing to laugh about!" I said. "Just the same—well, what do you think about it?"

* See China Year Book, 1926-27, p. 839.

"I think Wang Shui's too clever for us," she said, sobering.

"You really believe he's aboard?"

"Certainly. And now I've learned about this crew, I believe they're his men."

"Clever, but how?" I said, puzzled. "A little tinpot ship like this one, especially, has no secrets. Cleverness wouldn't work, unless the man were in the crew. And he isn't."

She shrugged, slightly, an odd gesture on her slight-shouldered Chinese body.

"You think of cleverness as something deep and subtle; I think of it as something very simple," she said. "Simplicity is far more baffling than anything else, Mr. Browne. Now, if you go around carrying that gun in your pocket, when the time comes you'll doubtless find the loads all gone or the gun jammed. That's simplicity itself."

"Oh!" I said, feeling foolish. "Thank you. I suppose you've got a gun hidden?"

"No," she said, and laughed at me. "Not hidden."

I went away. She might or might not be simplicity, but she was baffling as the deuce so far as I was concerned.

Howell and two of the men were going over the ship from truck to keelson, so I went up to the bridge. McGregor was there, having the deck. Everything had been very pleasant with the half-caste. That is, he was always purring and pleasant. He said, "Good-morning," looked down and saw Miss Lui walking into the bows, and grinned.

"She has seen more than most men," he said to me.

"What d'you mean?" I asked, not sure how to take his words. McGregor waved a sleek paw.

"Adventure! She was an agent for Dr. Sun before he died. She had seen all the wars in the north, going errands among the armies; she is a famous woman, Mr. Browne."

"Hm!" I said. "She's an odd duck, all right."

That tickled him, for some reason. He chuckled all over.

"You are right," he said. "They say men have no secrets from her. The French have put a good price on her head, because she nearly got them turned out of Yunnan. She is a patriot, and patriots are very dangerous."

"Less dangerous than plotters," I said.

McGregor looked at me for a moment, silently, and I got a wholly new impression of that man for one swift instant. Timid, sleek, effeminate—all gone! A man looking out at me there, sharply suspicious of my words; the claws were bared for that flashing second, and in place of the cat was a tiger. Then the mask was back in place and McGregor laughed.

"Patriots are plotters, always," he said sleekly.

I went away from there, too, with a cold feeling at the back of my neck. When you get an insight into a man it brings a certain revulsion—that is, such a man as McGregor. I no longer wondered about him.

At the foot of the ladder I ran into Howell, mounting with his instruments for the noon sight. He halted and gave me a look.

"Nothing doing. False alarm. What's happened to you?"

"Nothing much," I said. "McGregor doesn't need any more explaining, that's all."

"Oh!" He laughed silently, amusedly. "All right, m'lad, keep your eye peeled!"

That wound up everything. Wang Shui was not aboard and we had gone off on a false scent; nothing more to be done about it. There was no trouble with the men, the work got done and well done, and the old *Wung Chow* rolled along to the north and west without anything to worry over, outwardly or inwardly.

We knew, however, that the *comprador* had not indicated the pirate's name to Johnson for nothing, and the knowledge slowly festered in all of us, working uneasiness. We said no more on the subject, but I knew Howell was fully alive to what sort of man lay beneath the sleek, golden hide of McGregor.

I did have a lingering suspicion that the

sick man forward, who remained sick, might be Wang Shui; certainly none of the other men aboard answered Miss Lui's description of the pirate. So, just to satisfy myself, I went forward one afternoon and descended to the forecastle, in the bows.

It was mid-watch. The place was obscure, and such of the men as were awake eyed me with stolid suspicion. The sick man was there; he was obviously not malingering, and was as obviously not Wang Shui the Great. He was a mere shadow, all skin and bones, uncommonly like a mummy in appearance. His age was made evident by the old-fashioned pigtail coiled about his head, for it was extremely gray, almost white; his face, too, had the peculiar cavernous hollows of old age. He lay with his eyes closed. His hands, on his blanket, were very large, shrunken of skin, transparent—the hands of a sick old man. No chance of this being Wang Shui, evidently.

So I was checkmated very neatly in my suspicions. Afterward, I told Miss Lui about it, described the sick man, and she laughed in her gentle, dimpling way.

"We have all been very foolish, perhaps," she said quietly. "It is so easy to grow nervous, under the circumstances."

So that was that. I asked Howell the same night how on earth he had taken on an old man who was so obviously unable to do a tap of work. He laughed.

"The beggars slipped one over on me, Browne," he said. "They carted him aboard, said he was drunk with opium, and would be all right in the morning, so I signed him on. Also, they refused to sign themselves if I didn't take him. When I found how they'd fooled me, I felt sorry for the old blighter. By the way, we'll raise the China coast tomorrow afternoon."

"And nothing's happened," I said.

"Nothing would happen—yet," he answered with a shrug.

The weather had held perfect, and next day came out fine and warm. Miss Lui and I were together a good deal, for Howell had no time to waste on us; he was working hard over charts and calculations, and I understood that he was trying to fetch a certain point on the coast. Miss Lui said it was a little Chinese port named Hilong Bay, where arrangements had been made for taking care of our illicit cargo—a point well away from any treaty port, I judged.

At noon mess, Howell said he should raise the coast about four o'clock, but when we went on deck he was changing course to avoid a steamer's smoke to the eastward. Old Feng, as the sick man was named, was helped out on deck for the first time by two of the other men, and he sat on a mat near the forecastle hood, smoking a sleeve pipe and basking in the warm sunlight.

It was three o'clock, instead of four, when the blue line of coast became distinct on the horizon, and all of us thrilled to sight of China. The yellow men thrilled more than we did, naturally; they all came out and clumped around old Feng and stood staring at the coast-line, but I noticed they did not do much talking. McGregor showed up and sent them to work getting the hatches off, and it seemed to me that they looked to him narrowly, as if hanging on some word from him. Howell noticed it, and jerked his head to me. I left Miss Lui at the break of the bridge and went into the pilot-house.

"If all goes well we'll get rid of our stuff tonight," he said. "Now's the time to watch your step."

I nodded and went below, having my gun hidden in my cabin. It was there, and so were the spare clips of cartridges; but both they and the gun were empty.

How come? The obvious thing was to suspect Li, for the steward was the only Chinese who had access to the cabins. I knew better, and went back to the bridge and joined Howell.

"If I were you," I said to him, "I'd go look up a stock of cartridges and hand some around to your supercargo and so forth. Those you gave me were of the vanishing variety."

"Humph!" he said. "So were mine, as

I found this morning. Go down to McGregor's cabin and take a look-see—a good one. I'll keep the yellow dog busy."

"Mean to say you haven't any more?" I said. He gave me a grin.

"Think I'm a blinking arsenal, son? Move."

I moved. McGregor's cabin was locked, as it proved. Li showed up, but looked blank when I asked for a key, and shrugged his shoulders. I put my shoulders to the door and opened it at the third try, and the chubby steward grinned all over when it smashed down. He came along and looked on calmly while I pawed through the room and everything in it. McGregor, if any one, had sneaked away our cartridges, for he had access to all the cabin passages, naturally.

A few odds and ends turned up that McGregor would not have wanted others to see, but no cartridges, and I was stumped. Then Li put in his bar, with a bland and cherubic smile.

"Maybe you walk him shoe bottomside," he suggested.

I sniffed scornfully. Two pairs of high shoes were in sight, both shore-going patent leathers, carefully filled out with trees. I picked up a shoe and made it walk bottomside, and nothing happened. I looked up, and Li had silently departed. Either he had been making fun of me, or else was quite sure of his ground.

So I took the tree out, and found it merely a shell of aluminum on a metal spring-strap, such as may be had in any French port. Oddly enough, the boot remained very heavy, so I turned it upside down again. Still nothing happened. I explored, and my fingers came upon thick padding of cotton; this jerked out and something plopped to the floor. It was a neat little automatic pistol of small caliber.

Those four innocent boots yielded two nice little pistols, loaded, with extra clips and half a box of cartridges, and a good sixty rounds of larger cartridges, which fitted the Browning given me by Howell. I must admit that McGregor had pursued the very policy of simplicity laid down by Miss Lui, in concealing this stuff.

The door was smashed, there was no time to waste, so I pocketed my loot and went back to the bridge. There, I told Howell what I had found, but he only squinted out at the coast and nodded.

"Good," he said. "Put the stuff on the table in my cabin and cover it over with an old copy of the *China Herald*—you'll find it under my pillow. I'll be right along."

So I went back and obeyed orders, and waited. Howell came, lifted the newspaper, looked at the stuff, and covered it up again. Next moment McGregor came in.

"You sent for me, sir?" he purred.

"Aye," said the skipper. "We may have a bit o' trouble tonight. Have you any guns?"

"No, I haven't, sir," and the mate put on an anxious look. "If you could spare one—"

Howell looked at him, chuckled, and then struck out unexpectedly.

He must have hit that half-breed six times in three seconds. When he paused, McGregor was groggily hanging on to the table and gasping for air. Howell jerked aside the newspaper and showed him the pistols and cartridges.

"You're under arrest," he snapped. "Browne, put him in your cabin and lock him in. Take out anything you don't want damaged by personal contact with the swine."

I took McGregor's collar and ran him into my cabin, and left him there, all but knocked out, and went back to Howell. He gave me a cheroot and some cartridges.

"All over," he said. "If anything was planned, he was behind it. Keep him safe. The job is yours. Leave the key in the lock so he can't pick it."

I had already done just that, and Howell chuckled when I said so.

## V

HOWELL gave me no other instructions. I needed none. Common sense and putting McGregor in my cabin showed the way, for the port of my cabin

opened slap on the 'tween-decks, and at some distant time had been covered over with vitrophane, probably by some woman occupant. It was the only one so covered, and nobody could look in or see a face at that port.

It was a question, then, of keeping McGregor from communicating with the crew, for with him bottled up they would probably start no play. I figured out what I would do were I in the mate's shoes, and accordingly went right around to the 'tween-decks, empty at the moment. I waited alongside the port, and sure enough, presently heard it being unscrewed.

McGregor got a surprize. When he stuck his face out, I put my fist into it and knocked him sprawling.

"Now," I said, "you get up and screw that port down and leave it screwed down. If you don't screw it tight—and I'll count the turns—I'll be back inside there with more of the same medicine. If you don't leave it tight, you know what you'll get."

He was too frightened and hurt to call my bluff about counting the turns, and slammed the port shut and screwed it down promptly enough. I stamped away, then tiptoed back and sat down on the deck and lighted a cigaret, and watched.

Sure enough, in perhaps ten minutes, that port began to open without a sound. I got out my gun. None of the men were in sight. When McGregor swung open the port, I fired up into it. The bullet must have gone jumping and screaming around the steel walls of his room, for he let out a frightful howl and slammed the port shut again, shut for good, this time.

Miss Lui came along, looking rather hurried.

"Captain Howell wants to know if you fired a shot," she said.

"Tell him, 'yes,' if you please," and I laughed. "It was merely to make sure the cartridges had powder in them."

"Oh!" She gave me an odd look and went away. So did I. It was certain now that McGregor would make no more attempts.

The skipper, Miss Lui, Stuart and I met at the dinner table. Li brought in a fine big dish of the most appetizing curry I ever smelt. The last two fowls had gone to make it. He beamingly told us that the cook had prepared it specially, and I saw Howell exchange a look with him.

"In that case, Li," said the skipper, "take it to Mr. McGregor with my compliments, and let him enjoy it. I happen to know he loves curry."

Li chuckled all over. Miss Lui dimpled up too, and Stuart kicked my ankle when I uttered a protest against sending McGregor the whole dish.

"Let be," said the chief to me. "There's doings the night."

When Li replaced the curry with a tin of beef which he opened himself, I saw the point. We were taking no chances on the cook, this last night.

None the less, I wondered. The meal over, I slipped quietly away and took a look in my old cabin. McGregor was there, all right, dead to the world, apparently sound asleep in the very act of eating, the curry a third gone. He must have hogged it fast.

I switched out the light and stepped into the passage, thinking hard. The curry had been drugged, right enough, yet why should McGregor have been caught by it, if he were the head and brains of the supposed piracy? The thought grew and grew, and somewhere, somehow, I sensed that we had made a horrible mistake.

Illiogical? No doubt, yet impulse and sudden blind fear—if you ever felt around in an empty dark room and put your hand on a living thing, that's it. That's what this thought gave me! A regular panic. In the midst of it I saw Stuart coming to his cabin, pipe in mouth.

"Going below?" I asked dully.

"Not the night. The engines'll run, and I'm safer above. What's got ye?"

"Come in here and lend me a hand," I said, hastily, waking into that queer blind panic again. "For the love o' Mike, hurry! Hurry! Hurry, chief!"

We worked with McGregor for perhaps

ten minutes—a long time it was, and no nice work. We emptied his stomach and pummeled him and splashed him, and could not wake him. Stuart did not know why, and I was not sure, but we worked. I remembered now how Li had told me about those shoes. Honest, cherubic, plump Li! Fear grew and swelled within me.

"He won't come out of it," I gasped, desisting at length. Stuart shook his head dourly.

"He won't. What of it?"

"Got to reach Howell—"

I turned and broke away.

"Losh, man, are ye crazy?" cried Stuart after me, but I did not stop. Things suddenly bulked large. Crisis, unexplainable, was about me.

Perhaps, after all, it was only our animal sixth sense, the warning of intuition that peril hovered close. I had reached no conclusion, had gained no clear reasoning process. I sensed the truth, vaguely and dimly, through the glass of something gone wrong, the glass of error, of a horrible mistake. Unfortunately for us all, I had not put my finger upon the one real and fearful mistake we made.

It must be made clear that, then and there, my brain was living hours in bare seconds. Such is always the case, I presume, in deadly instants. Out in the passage between the cabins I was fumbling with one hand for my pistol, running, and I was aware of bland little Li standing in the doorway of the skipper's cabin, staring round-eyed at me. My thought was all on reaching Howell and getting him here at once, and I tore past the steward without a pause.

And, as I passed him, the little —— struck.

I sensed the attack, rather than felt it, too late. And then I felt it; a flaring flame of helpless agony, a violent shock, an exquisite stab of pain as the knife was wrenched out of me. The deck came up at me, and I felt the cold plates as my face slid over them. I had a revolving, confused glimpse of Li with a knife in his hand, hurling himself upon Stuart, and then everything was chaotic and dark.

What a fool, not to have plumped a bullet into the steward and called Howell afterward! Yet the appalling realization had not been clear-cut, had left me panic-struck and without initiative. And I paid for the folly.

Some little time must have elapsed. When I came to myself, I was lying out beyond the end of the passage, at the low railing just above the forward well-deck, in darkness. How I got there was problematical. Momentum of the fall, or perhaps I had dragged myself there before collapsing. There I was, at any rate, without pain, without any power to act or speak, my returning consciousness feeble and flickering.

Queerly enough, what had taken place was now perfectly clear to me, though I was slow to absorb the scene just below my eyes, where a flare had been lighted, bringing every detail of the well-deck into high relief. What ridiculous folly in all our suspicions, all our wise and philosophical discussions! What fools we mortals are!

Because Li was a trusted servant, suspicion fled him afar. Because McGregor was personally disliked and detestable, perhaps because he was a half-caste, suspicion had gripped hard and fast upon him. Beyond doubt, the mate was fully aware of the general contempt and distaste for him, and resented it, repaid it with silent hatred. Well, we had committed a huge blunder there, and had paid for it. That we had committed an even greater blunder was now revealing itself before my eyes.

The tarpaulin had been taken from the forward hatch and the wedges knocked out, but the hatch cover was still in place. Seated on it was old Feng, the sick one from forward. He sat bowed over, hands folded in his lap, distinct in the light from the flare. Howell was just beyond him, watching two red lights being run up into the forward rigging.

Abruptly, old Feng lifted his head and called out something. His voice came

with amazing volume, so that Howell turned and gave him a glance of astonishment. A reply came to him from the bridge. At that, Howell whipped about, one hand going to his pocket and, as he did so, Feng shot him in the back.

Hard to realize? Almost impossible. Feng sat there immovable, pistol across his knees. Howell spun around twice with his arms flinging out for support, then pitched to one side and lay face down. Two of the crew, near-by, flashed out knives and started for him, but Feng's voice cracked out and they stopped short.

And now occurred a curious thing—the explanation, in fact, of everything.

Feng stood up, looked toward the bridge, and called out again. The answer came, and he laughed. He put one hand to that gray pigtail coiled about his head, and tore it away with a swing that sent it hurtling out over the rail. A wriggling motion and he was out of his shirt, bare to the waist; he spat on his shirt, rubbed it over his face, flung it away, and then looked at his men and laughed. A howl of answering mirth went up from them—Chinese laughter, dark with cruelty.

A new man stood there. Thin and fragile, certainly, the shadow of a strong body devasted and brought low by sickness, yet a new man from the fragile old wisp we had known. In place of the gray pigtail appeared close-cropped black hair; the painted shadows and hollows were smeared away from the face, so that its look of decreptitude had vanished; and a shrill, exultant yell from the staring chinks apprised me of the truth.

"Wang! Wang Shui!"

This woke me up and no mistake. I seemed to have been lying there, looking on, for an eternity, yet it could scarcely have been a moment since Howell went down. The paralysis which had seized upon me was a bewildering thing—my brain was active, but I had no sense of feeling in my body. At the moment, I thought I was dying and done for.

At all events, I was helpless, my hand still jammed into my jacket pocket where my pistol was. I could do nothing but look on. When the yell died down, Wang Shui snapped a command, and got instant action. The yellow men vanished and there was a pattering of feet. Two of them came up the ladder and found me there. I shut my eyes, heard them sing out something, smelt their rank rancid bodies above me; then they were gone. Dimly enough, it came to me that they took me for dead.

They were back at the rail a moment later, shouting down at Wang Shui in shrill excitement, then disappeared once more. Since there was no sign of Li; I conceived that he had got Stuart, but had probably paid the price of his treachery, and I was right about it. A burst of laughter came from above, and I looked down at the well-deck once more.

Wang Shui stood as I had last seen him. The two red lights, evidently Howell's signal to some craft he expected to meet, were jerked down and stood on the deck. Two men were coming down the ladder, bringing Miss Lui with them. She was quite unhurt, and on gaining the deck walked up to Wang Shui with her arms held on either side. Her back was toward me, so I could not see her face in this moment.

Wang Shui grinned at her and spoke, evidently relishing the situation mightily. The two men let her free, and she talked back to him; all their speech was Greek to me, naturally. I saw Wang Shui jerk up his pistol and shove it into her breast, but she did not move, and if I were not mistaken, a flicker of admiration came into the pirate's face. He drew back a step and gave an order; the two men gripped her arms and led her back into the shadows.

Here came an interval, blank to me, probably a fainting spell of short duration. When I looked up again and lifted my head, the steward Li was down on the deck before Wang Shui, lying there; two men had just brought him. He came to one elbow, and I could see blood all over one side of his head. Poor Stuart must have battered him savagely against the plates. Wang Shui stooped down and

took his hand for a moment, and Li dropped in a huddle, dead.

There was something of affection in this action, something strangely out of place, incongruous and amazing to me. Whether any relation existed between the two men, I never knew; but there it was, a human and natural thing against a background of cold horror. Wang drew himself up, gave an order, and a man went to the petrol flare. There came a sharp cry of protest.

It was Miss Lui. I saw her now, bending over Howell and speaking rapidly to Wang. He made a gesture of assent, shot a look around the dark horizon, and seated himself on the hatch cover. As nearly as I could make out, Miss Lui was bandaging the skipper—evidence that he was not dead.

A man whom I knew to be the assistant engineer showed in the light, spoke to Wang Shui and was given curt instructions. All were in it, then—all of them! Miss Lui stood up over Howell and called two of the men. They came, but waited before Wang Shui until he made a gesture of assent. Then they lifted Howell and carried him up, not by the port ladder where I lay, but by the starboard ladder on the other side, presumably to his cabin.

Wang Shui looked at the woman before him. I could not see that he gestured or spoke, but, swift as cats, two men stepped out and caught her by the arms. They brought her over to Wang, and I saw her smiling, as he spoke to her. There was something he wanted to know, obviously. She shook her head. Wang Shui reached back to his hip and produced a seaman's knife. The two men held out her arms. He reached forward with his knife and slit open the silk blouse at her throat.

All this took place literally beneath my eyes, perhaps twenty feet from me.

## VI

WHILE these things have taken much time in the recounting, I believe they really happened very swiftly, in rapid sequence of events. The *Wung Chow* was still driving ahead full speed under a starry but moonless sky. I was supposed to be dead, evidently, or Wang Shui would never have assumed such a pose of magnificent assurance and careless disregard of everything around.

Still smiling, as if deeply amused, Wang spoke again to Miss Lui. She had lost her smile now, but shook her head once more. The parted silk of her blouse hung over either breast, showing her throat and bosom. Wang Shui reached out and laid his knife-point against her flesh, and spoke again, as if giving her a last chance.

Just then some one came wheezing above me, went past, and padded down the ladder to the well-deck in the darkness—a dim shape, silent, meaning nothing to me except peril. The ship's engines stopped abruptly, too, probably by reason of Wang's orders. We floated quietly, star-clad, the well-deck a flaming pit of white light below me.

Wang Shui pressed with his knife, and I saw red drops come out on the girl's breast. Then, with this blood, the pirate began to draw a Chinese character on her skin. His gestures made his purpose quite clear—he meant to carve this character in her flesh, when he had drawn its outline.

At that instant, with the stoppage of the engines, I realized that my muscular control had returned. I could move. Perhaps the mere cessation of that steady pounding thrum below jerked my brain back to normal; an abrupt silence can do queer things to the human brain. My hand completed the motion it had begun when I was passing Li, and brought the pistol out of my pocket.

Then I felt pain, with the motion. The steward's knife had slipped from a rib, most luckily, and instead of piercing me had butchered my back, very likely taking in some of the nerve ganglia on its way. And it hurt, —— how it did hurt at this moment! Pain I needed to wake me up, however, and I deliberately moved, caught the lower bar of the rail-piping, pulled myself half-erect. Then I clung there in a blinding swirl of sparks for an instant, as my head cleared.

And ere it cleared, a better man was ahead of me.

That petrol flare, below, was placed against the bulkhead on the starboard side to illuminate the hatchway, which it did very efficiently. Through this well of light I saw a figure dart and leap. It was upon Wang Shui even before his men could yell. With one hand it caught his knife-wrist and jerked it sharply back; with the other it held a knife under his armpit, pressed to the skin of his side.

It was McGregor.

After one sharp, panted command in Chinese, he stood motionless, master of the scene. Wang Shui could not move lest the knife drive into him; his men dared not interfere. One or two of them cried out and then fell silent. McGregor repeated his command. The two men holding Miss Lui let go her arms. McGregor motioned with his head and she walked away to the starboard ladder and I did not see her again for the moment.

What a man that half-caste was! He had not a ghost of a chance, in the end, and knew it well enough. The tiger in him was all to the front now, the sleek cat was gone. He stood gripping Wang Shui's arm, his eyes glinting and glaring around, teeth showing as his lips drew back. Abruptly, a stream of Chinese burst from him; I think he was making a lone-handed play for control, by virtue of the hostage under his knife-point.

Then occurred an incident typically Chinese in its cold-blooded disregard for human suffering. The two men who had released Miss Lui stood to the right of the hatch, a bit abaft it. One turned to the other and seized him by the throat. I did not know what it meant, certainly no one else did, until he forced the other man backward deliberately. Then a frightful scream, and the well-deck was plunged into darkness. The man had extinguished the flare with his comrade's body.

What happened then was difficult to say, impossible to see. Figures swirled back and forth. I heard McGregor's voice lifted in shrill, panted curses, and they were choked midway. The deep, piercing voice of Wang Shui drove out amid the pound of naked feet on the plates, and following the sound of it, I saw his indistinct figure below me.

My head was all too clear now. I rested the pistol on the rail, aimed, and pressed the trigger. I got my man.

Too late to save poor McGregor, but not to late to avenge him. Wang Shui went down. Next instant, figures were on the ladder below me. A pistol spurted fire. I shot again and again, until the hammer clicked and the ladder was clear. Some one came up along the rail, and I heard Miss Lui's voice.

"Who is it? Quick, quick—the cabins!"

She had gone to pieces; I could tell it in her voice. Small blame to her, either, but it was no time to go hiding in the cabins. I was on my feet now, and if I got off them I would not get on them again in a hurry. It was win or lose all at one crack, now.

"Stop babbling!" I said. "Shut up! There's a belt hanging over my berth—bring it here, and do it quick! Get a pistol off the captain's table, if one's there yet. —— it, will you move?"

She moved at that, and was gone in the darkness.

Shrill yells seemed to be going up from everywhere as I fumbled for an extra clip, shoved it in, then got fresh cartridges into the empty one. I was to my feet now, and the piping of the rail went on up past me to the bridge above, so I could pass an arm around it for support. Momentarily, I was safe, protected from above by the overhang of the bridge. No figures were moving about below, but the cheeping voices repeated the name of Wang Shui, and I knew I had settled him. It made me feel better.

The only light in the well-deck came from the two red lanterns, still slung and lighted, and it illumined nothing. A step behind me, and Miss Lui was at my side.

"Here's the belt," she said.

"Good girl. Get it under my arms and around this piping. Don't touch my lower back, for ——! Under my arms—that's right—support me—"

I felt her warmly against my side for a moment, as she worked, and was thankful she had regained her poise. She adjusted the belt and drew it up, buckled it.

"You're hurt?" she said. "Let me—"

"Shut up!" I said, impolitely. "Your job is to go down into that —— and hoist those two red lights. They're still on the line. I'd do it, but I can't walk. I'll try to cover you."

"Wang's dead, they say!" came her voice.

"Move, blast it!" I shrilled at her. "I know he's dead. Now or never is your time!"

She was brave enough. Without another word she slipped down the ladder and was gone.

I waited what seemed an eternity. There was a bare chance she might make it and live. Yet the gamble was a good one. Wang Shui was undoubtedly the only one of the gang to have had a pistol—coolies don't have much chance to hang on to such weapons ashore, and even less to bring any aboard ship. Howell would have searched that gang to the hide. If Wang Shui were alive, those red lights would not stay up a moment, would not even get up; but Wang was dead, and with his death the others had become a demoralized gang of panicky rats, cornered and fighting, but with all guiding intelligence destroyed. Sooner or later the signal must bring the boat Howell expected.

Sooner or later—there was the rub! How long I could last was doubtful; though with the supporting belt I felt in fair shape. The expanse of the sea was quite dark, and my heart sank. Useless, perhaps, after all.

From somewhere, the sound of a scuffle, a yell. The two red lanterns were swinging up in the air. More yells. Two shapes moved below, to my right, and I fired at them. Then, midway of the narrow passage to my right, across the front of the cabins, came an astonishing patch of light, and it struck full upon a naked man from the black gang, darting at me with his knife out. I let him have it full. He whirled about, fell, and dragged himself back into the darkness, groaning and whimpering.

I stared at the patch of light, wondering—why, it came from the skipper's port! Howell must be alive, awake, must have swung aside the curtain! I swung about, looked down. The well-deck showed nothing at all. The red lights were up, steady, high.

"Mr. Browne!" Her voice came from the ladder's foot below. "I'm—ah! Look out above!"

I twisted about, just as a knife drove by my neck. A man was on the ladder there, leaning far over, thrusting at me. To my shot, he pitched off and thumped on the deck below. And now a pistol echoed my shot, from the forecastle. One of those yellow devils must have secured Wang Shui's pistol. He shot again, and the bullet spanged on the iron piping beside me. I answered with my last cartridge, worked in my fresh clip, and rattled bullets all around him. One of them got him, for he screeched horribly and did no more shooting.

"All right!" panted Miss Lui, springing up beside me. "Probably none of them will realize what the lights mean. The captain can walk a little."

"Aye, he can that!" came the voice of Howell himself, faint and weak but with his old dry chuckle. "And what's more to the point, he's got a gun! Where's Browne, eh?"

"Here," I said. "If we could get those deck lights turned on—"

"Turn 'em on, Miss Lui," said Howell. His voice seemed far away. "You'll find the box with the switches—"

That was all I heard. Howell was here, the emergency passed. I must have sagged limply on the supporting strap.

The sharp, insistent reports of a pistol brought me back, and I blinked around as I straightened up on my feet. Silence. A hand to my back showed bandages around me. Good for Miss Lui! Where was Howell, then?

Lights. The deck passages were lighted now, no one in sight. My foot struck

against something, and I looked down to see Howell there on the deck, senseless. Sharp realization waked me, then came Miss Lui's voice.

"He should not have come out—he fainted. Here's your pistol, reloaded. They just tried to rush us—"

She was leaning against the rail, almost beside me, shoving the pistol at me. They must have come close to pulling it off, too. Half her silk blouse was ripped away, and along her naked right arm was a wale of blood; her hair was down, and tears were streaming over her cheeks. She had gone to pieces now that it was over, temporarily.

The urgency spurred me to an effort of will, jerked me to myself, luckily, for Miss Lui all but collapsed against me, whimpering that she had killed two men. It made me laugh, even at such a moment. She, who had seen battle and the hideous track of Chinese armies, unnerved over killing two coolies! But there's no logic in a crisis, not to mention a woman. They must have tackled her at pretty close quarters, too.

I utilized fragments of her torn silk blouse to bind up the scratch along her arm, and presently she began to laugh at herself, shamedly, and pulled herself together. While we were in the light, so were the passages and ladders; the ship lay motionless, barely heaving to the swell. She must have switched on all the lights, for two were going below, lighting the well-deck. I could see McGregor lying on the hatch, two other shapes sprawled out near his body, and Wang Shui directly below where I had shot him. How many of his gang remained was a question. Probably Miss Lui had wounded two men instead of killing them as she thought.

The two red lights still swung high. We must have been close to the coast, for I could see a dark splotch against the water, not far away, perhaps an island. However, the imminence of this danger did not worry me in the least.

"Think they've had enough?" I asked.

Miss Lui listened to the chattering murmur of voices, then caught her breath. She turned a strained face toward me.

"They say they will rush us, get the money they know is in the safe, take a boat and make for the coast. They think I'm alone, because they knew you had fainted. They're coming now!"

I laughed, and sagged down in the belt again, my head hanging. There was no chance to go in for explanations. Probably the woman thought I had really fainted, for I heard her repress a startled cry; but I was not thinking of her just then. As my head hung, I could see the passage behind us and to our right, and moving figures were already there.

Miss Lui reached down, caught up the pistol that had fallen from Howell's hand, and fired twice. They were coming now, and coming fast, knives out, and as they came, I whipped around and my pistol opened on them. I could not trust myself to hit, except at close quarters; but these were close enough. A yell of dismay shrilled up from them as I came into action. Howell, wakened by the shots, rolled over, cried out sharply with pain, then began to struggle up.

An iron pin came for me through the air. I saw it, could not dodge it, shot the man who hurled it, and then it smashed fair into me. All the world went up in sparks, and that was the end so far as I was concerned.

## VII

I PUT a hand to my head, found an egg-sized lump over my ear, and pulled myself together by aid of the belt under my shoulders. The air seemed full of voices, all Chinese. They came from the water, from below, from above. Miss Lui was not in sight. I was there all alone except for a dead coolie on the deck.

Then Howell came in sight, pulling himself along the rail and grimacing. He halted and waved a hand at me.

"All over! That's our craft down there—they've got men aboard now."

"Our craft?" I said, staring. "No ship—oh! That dark splotch on the water!"

"That's it," said Howell. "Your red lanterns and the shooting did the business for us. It's all over but the paying. Twenty per cent. split for you, old chap."

"To —— with your split!" I said, staring at the water alongside, where the dark shape rose up. "Give it to McGregor's family, if he's got one."

Howell broke into laughter—sharp, keen-edged, bitter laughter.

"Aye, I'll attend to all that besides," said he. "And the twenty per cent. is yours all the same. We made some bad blunders, Browne. Miss Lui is looking up her bullion—"

"Oh, shut up!" I said, and looked down at the deck where McGregor lay. "I'd give it all and more if we had that chap back, if we hadn't made that blunder about him."

Howell dragged himself over to me and put a hand on my arm.

"Would you now, son?" he said, and his voice was queerly soft. "If you feel that way about it, how d'you think I feel —eh? My blunder, not yours. There's things a man can't forget and never will, Browne—things that burn into him and bite into him until his soul turns over and writhes, and he's got to live with himself. Aye! Live with his blunders. That's hell, lad. All the hell I ever want."

I looked at the burning gray eyes in his pallid face, and had no words to offer.

# The Killer

## *The Story of a Feud of the Cattle Trails*

By WALTER J. COBURN

THE HILTON-HUNGERFORD feud had its beginning during the Civil War, in that section of Missouri where the two families were struggling against gigantic odds to wrest homes from the wilderness.

When that strip of country along the Kansas-Missouri border became spattered, then drenched, with the blood of Yank and rebel, when farming became no longer possible and the raiders of both factions rode roughshod across their cornfields, these two Missourians tooks sides. Opposite sides.

Jeff Hilton joined the Jayhawkers and became one of that hard-riding band of raiders. Seth Hungerford cast his lot with Quantrell and fought with the Guerrillas.

Both were men of little education. Their native intelligence had been warped by the talk of others. What had once been a friendship between the two now shrank and withered and became distorted into a hatred that was destined for a baptism of blood. For there is no hatred so bitter as that which springs from the ashes of a broken friendship.

Each man had a large family, and the sons, leaving school to take up their fathers' work on the farms, took sides, and the worm fence that separated the two farms became a deadline across which bitter taunts were passed in sneering, drawling insult or hot, quick-worded challenge that ended in hard-fisted blows.

Then, one rainy morning, Hilton's oldest boy, a lad of sixteen, killed Seth Hungerford's seventeen year old son with a Barlow knife. The hogs had gotten to the dead body when one of the Hungerford girls found it where it lay along the Hungerford side of the crooked worm fence.

Young Hilton, late that same night, stepped to the door to investigate some strange noise outside. He was shot as he stood outlined against the tallow-dip light of the room behind him. Shot clean through the head, for Tug Hungerford, though only thirteen years old, could knock the head off a squirrel at fifty-yard range.

The following day, when each family buried their dead and then came in out of the dismal rain to cheerless cabins that seemed all the more empty now that a

loved one had gone, they talked over the matter.

The muffled sobs of the women mingled with the *drip-drip* of the rain outside. The boys of each family, boys who had but a few weeks ago played schoolboy games together, now oiled the mechanism of squirrel guns and long-barreled pistols. An iron kettle filled with melted lead hung on its crane before the open fire in each cabin. Bullet molds and powder horns lay on the table.

Ma Hilton took the fiddle that once had squeaked so merrily in the deft hands of her son and, wrapping it in an old silk dress, put it away forever, her tears blotching the faded silk wrapping. Then she came back to mold more bullets.

Seth Hungerford's wife, dry-eyed, her seamed face hardening into lines of bitter grief that told of a torn heart that had no outlet in weeping, stared into the blaze of the fire in brooding silence.

It was the women who bore the brunt of that terrible war. These women, already aged by man's labor in clearing fields, cooking meals, making clothes and otherwise caring for large families, had long since despaired of gleaning pleasure from life.

Grief was no new burden to the two mothers who had once leaned friendly elbows on that crooked fence and passed trivial gossip on sunny mornings. Each took this fresh burden with mute stoicism; if either woman grieved over the severing of the one friendship that made life tolerable in the wilderness, she gave no sign. Each cast her lot with her children and read from her Bible when time permitted.

The girls of each family did the complaining and weeping. Sissy Hungerford, who had been "going steady" with the dead Hilton boy, and Sukie Hilton, who had planned to marry young Hungerford some day, were loudest in their wailing. But the feud had taken deep root in soil stained red with blood, and grew as only something malignant can grow.

Jeff Hilton, while on a furtive visit home, was caught and hanged by the Guerrillas. Seth Hungerford, half drunk on corn whisky, fitted the noose about the neck of the man who had been his neighbor.

"Grin while ya kin, Hungerford," Hilton told him as the rope went about his neck, "fer there's a Hilton bullet molded with yore —— name on it!"

That night, when Seth Hungerford led a band of men to burn the Hilton home, the bullet "with his name on it" found its mark.

Ma Hilton, dying with fever, was blessed with unconsciousness when the cabin burned, cremating her. Sukie had, days before, run off. The others, mere children, were murdered, with one exception. That one exception was twelve year old Brad Hilton, who lay hidden in the brush, a long-barreled rifle in his grimy little hands.

Tears rolled down his cheeks, making white streaks in the grime. His teeth were clenched until his jaws ached, and he sobbed out terrible curses the meaning of which he did not understand. And when Seth Hungerford's lanky frame loomed clearly against the red glow of the burning cabin, the boy raised his gun.

His cold, tear-wet cheek lay against the wooden stock. Eyes, gray like his father's, hardened as they lined the sights of the rifle that rested its heavy weight across a fallen log. Then Brad Hilton's bullet crashed through the drunken brain of Seth Hungerford.

Brad ran away under the cover of darkness. He was the last of the Hiltons and had run only when his odds were too great to overcome.

Seth Hungerford's wife buried her husband the next day. Then she loaded her pitifully few belongings in a wagon, told little Tug Hungerford, the only male member of the family left, to hook up the mules.

"Whar we goin', maw?" he asked.

"Texas, God willin'. Git a move on, Tug. Mind ya taller that Mose mule's neck afore ya put a collar on 'im, else he'll balk."

## II

ADD TWENTY odd years to a man's life, let him grow a beard, give him a new name, and there is little about that man to connect his identity with that of a spindle-shanked youngster not yet in his 'teens. Brad Hilton, the boy, was now Bert Boone, the man, and the only thing that remained of the boy's identity was a pair of cold gray eyes that looked steadily from under straight, corn-colored brows. Jeff Hilton had had eyes like that—gray eyes with tiny black flecks spattering the gray.

"Powder marks," some Texan termed the black specks, and so Bert Boone gained the handle of "Powder" Boone. As Boone drifted about the Southwest, the nickname followed him but most men misconstrued the origin of it and attached the "Powder" to the fact that Boone was a killer.

From San Antone to Fort Benton in Montana, men knew and feared Powder Boone. Abilene, Dodge City, Tombstone and El Paso had heard the roar of his white-handled gun. For Powder Boone's calling was that of trail boss for any cow outfit that needed a good man and was willing to pay top wages.

"Powder Boone," they said of him, "will bring a herd through in spite uh ——, bad weather, Injuns er sheriffs."

And even those cowmen who were noted for the tightness of their purse-strings, bid high for the services of this close-mouthed, cold-eyed cowpuncher.

There were certain other bids for his services. Bids of more sinister nature than that of a mere trail boss—more lucrative and, in those days of the middle Eighties, when law hung greatly on a man's speed with a gun, not exactly dishonorable. Every big cow outfit had its quota of quick-triggered cowboys who wore good clothes, were allotted easy tasks and, when the occasion rose, earned their pay in a few split-seconds.

So, because Powder Boone had killed several men in fair fights, he was approached from time to time by cattlemen who needed such a man. Always they were met with the same answer, as Powder Boone, sitting on his heels whittling, looked at them from under his hat brim.

"The sign ain't right yet. Cain't noways make out tuh take no sides as yet. When I do, mistah, my services is plumb free."

Beyond this enigmatic statement, Powder Boone was silent on the subject and men wondered about it from time to time; wondered and waited for that time to come when Powder Boone would take sides in a war that was stealthily creeping across that portion of Texas where cowmen were hiring men who packed guns with the triggers filed off. Men such as Sam Bass, Billy the Kid and others were making money rustling cattle in open defiance of the law. With very few exceptions, these men worked hand in glove with the big cattlemen. Between those periods when they rustled whole herds and drove them up the trail, these men held up trains or an occasional bank.

"Looks like a man like you'd th'ow in with them boys, Powder," an envious cowboy would say.

"When the sign comes right, pardner, I mebbeso will. Mebbe not. Cain't tell. How's things in New Mexico?"

"Gittin' some tight in Lincoln County. Sheep fellers is hirin' men. Why'n —— will a cowboy fight fer a sheep spread, Powder?"

"Fer silver, I reckon. Flat silver that kin be blowed fer licker en faro en wimmen. —— of a life, when yuh come down to it, an' no mistake. I ain't got religion none but I cain't he'p but wonder what, fer a deal, them boys'll git when the Big Tally Boss looks at their marks an' brands an' reads 'em fer a hired-out killer."

"That sounds shore queer, Powder, a-comin' from you."

"Yeah?" Powder Boone turned the cold gray light of his eyes on his companion.

"You've killed fellers, ain't yuh?" the man defended himself.

Boone smiled one of his rare smiles.

"I kill fer pers'nal reasons, pardner. Never made a dollar at it. Never aim tuh."

Powder Boone snapped his jack-knife shut, brushed the whittlings from his lap and walked off, leaving his companion filled with puzzling doubt.

He had no way of knowing that there was a deadly purpose behind the aimless wanderings of Powder Boone, who followed the Goodnight and Chisholm Trails out of Texas into the Nothern States. No man in that country had the slightest inkling that this silent cow boss was the son of Jeff Hilton, Jayhawker, and that he had covered thousands of miles in vain search for the one remaining Hungerford. Tug Hungerford, whose dad had hanged his dad.

Several years before, when Powder Boone was just a common cowhand, he had helped trail a herd from the Llano Estacada to Missouri. He had learned by cautious questioning that Tug Hungerford and his mother had left Missouri and headed for Texas. Beyond that, there was no trace of them. He guessed that they had, like himself, changed their names.

And thus it was that Powder Boone, driven always by the bitter hatred in his heart, scoured half a dozen States in his hunt for the last of the Hungerfords. No better cowman rode the trails, and a hundred and more chances came his way to own his own herd and settle down on land that could be had for the asking. But he drifted on, wrapped in brooding silence, from one cow-town to the next, a lonely, solitary figure.

A thousand pulse-quickening scenes had shifted before his flecked eyes and passed on into forgetfulness. But one scene remained—that burning cabin in the wilderness along the Missouri border.

Nights when the white moon rode the star-filled sky and he slowly circled the sleeping herd of longhorn steers, that vision came to haunt him. All the terror and horror of it that had shriveled his boy's heart that night came back to ride with him through the hours of his guard. That memory left no room for softer things that should have come into the life of the man.

Nights when the cold drizzling rain swept the plains, reminding him of that other night when women's sobs had mingled with the dripping rain and his brother's body lay on the floor covered with a ragged quilt there in the Hilton cabin, Powder Boone rode all night. When he came into camp at dawn, his body chilled and soaked, his face haggard, no man in his outfit ever questioned him. There was something in the trail boss's eyes that forbade questioning.

Month after month until months lengthened into years, Powder Boone rode his trail. For the most part, men let him alone. He never gambled or bothered with the women of the frontier dance-halls. When he drank, he held his liquor well and became, if such a thing were possible, more silent than ever with each drink. When a quarrel was unavoidable, he shot his way out with an ease that had a demoralizing effect on others of the killer type who hoped to further their sinister reputation by an easy victim.

Powder Boone gave no man his friendship. He asked no favors, though he granted many to others at various times. His men would follow him without question, though their loyalty was based neither on fear nor friendship. Rather, they respected the judgment of this man, who kept apart when other trail bosses would have fallen into the many pitfalls that lay along the dusty trail between the Texas Border and the Canadian Line—traps that had cost more than one boss his job and meant big losses to the owners.

For along that trail were camped bands of men who preyed upon the trail herds, rustling cattle. With the boss and his men in town drunk, the herd with its two or three men on guard was easy meat for these raiders. But Powder Boone never got drunk, and on the several occasions when rustlers had ridden down on his herd, they found a man waiting in the dark who shot to kill and did not quit killing so long as a human target remained in sight. Barring natural losses, Powder Boone's herd invariably made its destination pretty much intact.

If a man who belonged in his outfit got

in trouble of any sort, Powder Boone got him out whether the man was rightly or wrongly in his predicament.

"I don't hire nothin' but top hands," would have been his excuse if any one had questioned him, "and I don't aim tuh work short-handed. The only way they got tuh takin' one uh my boys is tuh kill him."

But a man can not build up such a reputation without making enemies. Bad enemies. Those men called Boone a speckled-eyed —— and laid careful plans to "hang his hide on the fence" and incidentally steal the next herd that Powder Boone brought up the Chisholm Trail.

When word came that Powder Boone had left the XIT ranch in Texas with a trail herd, these men gathered to "make medicine." Their meeting place was Dodge City where Powder Boone had few friends and many enemies. For three days they caroused and then, singly or in little groups of two or three, rode out of town to meet once more in three days at the spot chosen for the slaughter.

Because Dodge City knew little of law, because it was not uncommon for men to boast openly of thievery, the news of their going and the nature of their business was common gossip throughout the saloons and gambling halls. Men even made bets as to the outcome, and joked about it. The sheriff was out of town and it is doubtful whether he would have attempted interference had he been there to hear. The sheriff of Dodge City had plenty to attend to without passing beyond the boundary of his jurisdiction perhaps to be killed saving a man of the taciturn habits of Powder Boone.

"Lay you ten to one," announced a gambling-house proprietor who had been on a five days' celebration and was in a reckless mood, "that it's the last herd Powder Boone ever brings up the trail."

"How much yuh willin' tuh go?"

The questioner was a man well over six feet, angular, hawk-nosed, black-eyed, whose garb spoke plainly that his calling was that of a cowman. He wore two guns, both tied low on his thighs, so that when his bony, big knuckled hands swung in walking, they brushed the cedar butts of the long-barreled Colts.

"And who in —— may you be, stranger?" questioned the gambler, startled at the audacity of any one foolish enough to call such a bet.

A smile spread the lips under the cow man's drooping black moustache.

"Are yuh in the habit uh askin' that question very frequent, mister?" he drawled.

"My mistake. The drinks is on me, stranger. Now about this little bet? How much you want of this?"

And he dragged forth a fat roll of greenbacks, tossing the roll with its thick elastic band on the bar.

"All, mister." He matched the gambler's roll with one of equal size and then produced another of like thickness.

"And jest because I ain't no —— robber," smiled the cowman, "I'll cut yore odds tuh even money. Match them two wads, dollar fer dollar, and I'll collect the spread when Powder Boone waters his herd out yonder."

When the money had been counted and put in the safe, the lanky cowman elbowed his way through the crowd that had gathered around the bar, swung aboard the horse that was waiting outside and was gone in the night.

The place buzzed with talk of the bet. If any man there knew the identity of the stranger, he kept it secret. After a time the games were again in full swing, fiddle and accordion squeaked quick tunes, and the incident passed in the rush of fresher things.

The gambler, a little sobered by the wager, which amounted to a small fortune, scowled at the toe of his polished boot and gave himself up to mild reflection.

"He talked," he mused thoughtfully, "like a —— Missourian."

## III

"TI YIPPIE yi yay, git along, little dogies,
It's yore misfortune and none of my own,
Ti yippie yi yay, roll along, little dogies,
For soon Montana will be yore new home."

Dust rose sluggishly in the dead air.

The long, crooked line of slowly moving cattle stretched back among the buttes as far as the eye could see. Long-horned steers that traveled doggedly at a shambling walk, pounding up more puffs of yellow dust, headed north along the old Chisholm Trail, bound for a strange land.

The monotonous *click-click* of hoofs, the listless snatches of song that drifted through the dust haze that reddened the setting sun. Limp cigarets hung from bearded lips; men's eyes, reddened by wind and sun and dust, squinted from under the wide brims of flat-crowned hats, pulled low at a careless angle.

"As I walked out one morning for pleasure,
I spied a cowpuncher just riding alone.
His hat was thrown back and his spurs were a jingling,
And as he rode by me this song he was singing:
'Ti yippie yi yay, git along little dogies—' "

A steer bawled up on the point of the herd, breaking harshly into the rhythm of the cowboy's song.

"Water," grunted Powder Boone, who was riding on the point as became his position as trail boss. He raised his voice to call across the moving line of cattle to a cowpuncher who slouched sidewise in his saddle, one chaps-covered leg thrown across the saddle horn.

"Ol' Roany done sniffed water, Bill. Rim on back yonder an' tell the boys tuh drift up thisaway. Let Pud an' Jackson take keer uh the drags. This bunch uh dogies is shore gonna run-bawl when they gits a sniff uh yon water. We gotta game keepin' 'em from pilin' up. Ain't hit water since yest'day mornin' an' they're shore red-eyed."

The cowpuncher had whirled his horse and started back before the last words had left Powder Boone's lips. He was an old trailman and knew the danger that lay ahead. Fifteen hundred head of thirsty cattle and a creek ten feet wide along which to string them. Here was a situation that demanded cow-sense on the part of a trail boss, steel nerve and "savvy" on the part of every man in the outfit. Otherwise there would be a pile-up resulting in crippled steers that would have to be shot.

Ol' Roany, a roan-colored stag that had led the rest from the Pecos country, had broken into a short-gaited trot. His bawl now became a discordant chorus that held the danger note of cow-brute hysteria. The leaders had swung into that sullen trot as Powder Boone spurred off his hillside at a reckless gait that threw gravel in the air behind him. Yet there was no trace of excitement in his bearing as he swung in ahead of the roan stag, his quirt slapping against the bullhide leather of his scarred chaps.

"Yoo-ho-ho-ho-ho!" he droned, chanting as he half turned in his saddle to slap the roan stag across the eyes with his quirt. "Yooooo yuuuup, dogies, dogies, dogies, yo-ho-ho-ho!"

Riders came up out of the dust haze, taking their places alongside their boss. Bronzed, unshaved, dust-covered men with steady eyes and nerves as cold as ice—nerves tempered by stampedes and the barking of Colts guns. No need for idle instructions, for every man on the XIT payroll knew his duty and did it without a mistake.

The leaders' pace checking, the men spread out fanwise as the cattle behind came up. Behind the thin line of riders were fifteen hundred head of red-eyed Texas steers whose needle-pointed horns spread to the span of a man's outstretched arms. Horns that could, in a split-second, disembowel a cow-pony or gore a man.

"Ho-ho-ho-ho!" And the chant was drowned in the clash of horns. The men gave way a little as the herd crowded closer, some steers riding the others in their eagerness to bury their hot, dry noses in the water they smelled.

"Yonder she is," called Powder, pointing to a fringe of green that made a crooked line across the drab prairie ahead. "Yonder's water."

The herd was spreading wider each minute as the drags came up on bruised feet. Dim, ghostlike forms of the two drag-men now showed to the rear of the

herd, as the slanting rays of the setting sun penetrated the sluggish dust, making it golden.

Still the men fought to spread even wider the line of steers behind them. And when the line of riders reached the green banks of the creek and shoved across without letting their thirsty mounts halt to drink, the trotting steers lined the strip of water for a quarter-mile.

In a group, the men rode upstream to water their horses where it was not riled by the herd. Cinches were loosened, cigarets rolled. Half a mile upstream, a spiral of white smoke told them where the cook and horse wrangler had pitched camp.

None of these men had eaten since early morning, yet nobody mentioned hunger. They seemed indifferent to thirst or heat or cold or hunger. That was their way. No man of them had drunk from the creek until his horse had its fill. Not one mentioned the hunger that now gnawed at him.

Instead—

"Wonder if that slim-complected tinhorn's still runnin' that faro layout at the Cowboy's Rest at Dodge?"

"Aim tuh run him broke, Shorty?"

"Aim tuh run him outa Kansas," came the grinning reply. "He taken me fer all but my socks last trip up the trail. Saddle, spurs an' a pair uh new shop boots. Yuh mind, Powder?"

Powder nodded, smiling faintly.

"Powder gits my outfit back fer me. All that sport leaves me is my rod an' I warps that between his horns while Powder's takin' keer uh some ten-odd gents uh scrappin' nature. Only that I'm slowed down by the tanglefoot I've took on, I'd uh made a heap less sorry showin'. As it is, I gets me two-three. Had tuh club 'em, drat it. That red-headed heifer which I've bin piotin' aroun' doin' the quadrille has emptied my gun an' put in a mess uh shells loaded with 'dobe instead uh powder. I'm rearin' tuh cut the sign uh that pair uh deuces."

"Yon'er comes a hossbacker," announced another cowpuncher indifferently. "Rides like he had a hen on hatchin'. Bound yonderly, 'pears like."

There was a slight shifting of positions so that each man's gun was within easy reach. No man there but had his enemies, and a man's enemies may show up anywhere, at any time. Save for this slight indication of precaution, the conversation went on as carelessly as before. Of them all, Powder Boone seemed the most indifferent. He had pulled a boot off and was piercing tiny slits across the instep with a knife.

The rider drew rein. It was the tall man who had laid the wager at the Dodge gambling-house.

"Evenin', gents," he drawled, throwing his weight to one stirrup, his black eyes resting on Boone.

Powder Boone's flecked eyes took the man in from toe to hat brim in a quick glance.

"Light an' set, stranger," he invited the newcomer.

"Ain't you Powder Boone?" asked the man as he swung a foot with one long, easy movement. He was smiling pleasantly, but the smile did not pass beyond his lips.

"That's me."

There was the hint of a challenge in the affirmation. Though the man was a stranger, he might be friend or relative of some enemy. Boone's right hand, still holding the knife, had unobtrusively edged toward the white-handled gun at his side.

"My name's Bud Chadwell. Not that it makes a —— bit uh difference about the name."

He paused as if waiting for some comment. But Powder Boone did not speak.

"I'd be proud tuh th'ow in with this drive if you kin use a man, Boone."

Powder Boone put away his knife and pulled on his boot before making a reply. As if he expected to wait for his answer, Chadwell filled a cob pipe with natural leaf-tobacco and sat back on his heels, his lanky frame doubling up like a half-shut jacknife.

"I'm about full up on cowhands, Chadwell. Got men a-plenty tuh take my herd through."

"Onless a man er two was tuh git shot off on yuh," suggested Chadwell.

"In which case," Powder nodded in return, "it'll be plenty time then tuh look around fer fresh hands."

"Plumb right," agreed Chadwell. "Still, if you knowed that there was fifteen-twenty fellers a-waitin' along the trail, aimin' tuh take over this XIT herd, yuh might have a place fer a man that's smelt powder smoke?"

This bit of deftly put information did not seem to surprize Boone. His reply came unhurriedly, after several seconds' pause during which the gray-flecked eyes under the brim of his dusty hat again swept the newcomer searchingly. The trace of a scowl appeared between his corn-colored brows. Something about this man stirred vague memory. It nettled him that he could not readily place this man who called himself Bud Chadwell.

"This herd stealin's bin tried afore, mister," he finally spoke. "They drawed nothin' but a lot uh hard luck an' hot lead."

"This bunch is differn't, Boone. All the he-wolves outa Texas an' New Mexico is in it. They're shore enough men, an' aimin' tuh prove it. ——, man, you ain't *plumb* bullet-proof. They'll outcount yuh two tuh one fer men."

"Then why," came shrewdly from the trail boss, "are yuh so rearin' tuh th'ow in on the losin' side?"

"Tuh even up the odds a mite, Boone. They're layin' ten tuh one in Dodge that yuh don't git through. I jest sold my outfit in Arizona fer a twenty thousand. I lays 'er all that yuh'll win out. I come tuh protect my chips in the game, that's all."

"They're bettin' ten tuh one that I'm whupped, eh?" mused Boone. "Hmmmmm. Well I be ——. An' you takes a twenty thousand uh the money? Well, mister, that bein' the case, it looks like you kinda bought a interest in this spread, don't it? Yo're hired, Bud Chadwell."

Chadwell pulled a quart bottle of whisky from his pocket and, uncorking it, handed it to Boone.

Cow-country code decrees that a man drink only with his friend. To refuse to drink from a man's bottle is openly to declare an enmity. For a long moment, Powder Boone hesitated, his eyes holding the black ones of Bud Chadwell. Then he raised the bottle.

"Here's luck, Chadwell."

"Have at it, Boone."

And Powder Boone drank, wiped the sleeve of his shirt across the neck of the bottle and returned it. Chadwell smiled and passed it around to the men, then drank.

Without knowing it, Powder Boone had drunk with the man he had sworn to kill.

The years, in changing the boy Brad Hilton into the man Powder Boone, had worked similar changes in the appearance of Tug Hungerford who now passed under the name of Bud Chadwell. Chadwell's transformation was the more complete in as much as there are a thousand and one men with black eyes but few indeed that have eyes of powder-marked gray.

## IV

WHEN the cattle had drunk their fill of water and slowly grazed across the prairie, Powder tolled off three men to watch them and together with Bud Chadwell and the rest of his men rode to camp.

Saddles were jerked off sweat-streaked horses that now rolled luxuriously in the dust, shook themselves and went to grazing. The horse cavvy was held in the rope corral. A man in floursack apron above which jutted the black butt of a six-shooter bent over his dutch ovens, whistling the quick notes of "Hell Among the Yearlin's."

"Come an' git 'er, cowboys," he bawled, "er I th'ow 'er away!"

A tin wash-basin and a grimy towel passed along the line. Still without undue haste, the hungry men fished plate,

cup and "artillery" from a rawhide-covered mess-box and helped themselves to generous portions of beans, jerky and Dutch oven bread. Coffee, strong and black, with 'lasses for "sweetin'." There was little talk until plates were emptied and dropped into the waiting dishpan. Only when the odor of tobacco mingled with the smoke of the buffalo-chip fire, did they become talkative.

"Who's headin' this raidin' spread, Chadwell?" asked Powder, when he had sent three relief men out to the herd.

"The three Crosby boys, near as I could pick up from what they was sayin' aroun' Dodge. They 'lowed you'd killed one uh their kinfolks at Abilene last fall. The oldest brother, wa'n't it?"

"Bob Crosby," nodded Powder. "He aimed he was gonna work my herd fer stray stuff. I 'lowed I'd kill him first steer he cut. Which I done kep' my word. He'd orter knowed better. Bob Crosby was onery thataway. 'Twa'n't the fust run-in me'n him'd had. I worked alongside his outfit on the Brazos. Tried twict afore tuh kill me an' I let him off. Third time the play come up, I taken him. Thought the Crosbys was in Tombsone?"

"Was, till the Earps run 'em out. Wyatt Earp's king uh Tombstone these days. Chaw?" Chadwell held out a ragged plug of tobacco.

"Obliged." Powder cut off a corner with his knife. When his jaw bulged, he again spoke.

"How's that country fer a lay?"

"Good er bad, accordin' tuh how yuh like Wyatt Earp. There's some folks driftin' acrost into Pleasant Valley an' Tonto Basin—cow folks. ——'s gonna pop afore long. They're puttin' loopholes in their houses. Bad blood on both sides. ——'s tuh pay afore long."

"I come from there three months ago," said Powder. "Queer, ain't it, that I never cut yore sign till now? Dunno as I've heered uh yuh, neither, so's tuh recollect."

Chadwell tugged thoughtfully at his drooping mustache. His wide mouth twisted upward in a one-sided grin.

"I don't mind tellin' yuh, Boone, that I ain't had this name no —— of a long spell. Goin' under one name all the time gits onhealthy. Times is changin'. Law's a gittin' closter all the time an' them that's enforcin' that law ain't no better'n the men they're killin' in the name uh that same law. Yuh can't name a marshal that ain't in cahoots with some rustler bunch. They're killers with a star pinned to their shirt. Who's the hero uh Texas this minute, Boone? Sam Bass, by gravy!

"Sam's dead, but he made hist'ry while he was goin'. The law gits him but that don't keep folks from makin' up a song about him that's bein' sung from the Pecos tuh Canady. Boone, fer men like you an' me, there can't be no law except ol' Colts' law an' our own judgment. So, instead uh goin' tuh law with my troubles, I enforces what I think's right, swaps my name fer a new un an' drifts to a fresh climate."

Bud Chadwell quit speaking. The group around the fire, sensing the fact that the stranger had not finished, kept silent. Yet they showed scarcely a flicker of interest in what he was saying. That is, none of them save Powder Boone who had quit whittling on the stick he held and was showing more than ordinary interest in this lanky, black-eyed man who wore two guns and wore them after the manner of a professional killer.

"A long time ago, gents," Chadwell addressed the group, "I killed a feller without givin' him his chanct. I've downed men since, but no human kin claim without lyin' like a dog that I didn't give 'em equal chance with me. That, boys, is my law. I'll live up to it er go down a-tryin'."

"A good enough law fer any man, these days," said Powder Boone, "pervidin' he's fast with his rod. Them's purty much my feelin's on the subject. But comin' right down tuh cases, supposin' there was some man yuh hated bad enough tuh want tuh kill him off? Supposin' fu'ther, that this gent is a faster man than you, er jest as fast, anyhow? What's the odds

how yuh kill him? What differn'ce does it make if yuh shoot him in the briskit from in front er lay in a bush an' spot 'im where his suspenders cross? What's the differn'ce?"

And Powder Boone's flecked eyes seemed a trifle red, there in the firelight.

"All up to the man that's doin' the killin,' Boone." Chadwell paused, smiling crookedly. "Take me'n' you fer a odd example. There's you, say, hatin' my guts, wantin' tuh down me. Here's me, mebbe so feelin' likewise. You know I ain't gonna draw till we both has a even break. Mebbe I'm the one man in the whole world yuh'd give the most tuh see dead. Are yuh gonna bushwhack me, Powder Boone? No, by ——! Yuh'll take yore man's chance an' live er die accordin'!"

"Why?" Powder Boone's voice was a bit husky.

"Don't ask *me* why, Boone, fer it's suthin' beyond my reasonin' powers. All I kin tell of a man is what I see writ in his eyes. Did yuh ever kill a man without givin' him his chanct, Boone?"

"One. He was a human skunk, Bud Chadwell, that didn't have the right to a man's chanct. He was a low lived ——."

"Hold on, Boone!" Chadwell's voice no longer drawled softly. But both his hands were free from his guns. Noticeably, purposely free, so it seemed.

"Bad luck tuh cuss out dead folks," he went on, his voice assuming its lazy tone once more. "I'm plumb superstitious thataway. Bring bad luck down on us. Mind, Boone, I got twenty thousand bet on this deal."

The color ebbed back into Boone's face and he relaxed. The hand that a moment before had closed over the ivory butt of his gun now came away from the weapon and he matched Bud Chadwell's cold smile with one equally frigid. Every nerve in Powder Boone's body was now under perfect control and whatever process of thought went on inside his brain was well hidden behind the powder-marked mask of his gray eyes.

If Powder Boone recognized the newcomer as Tug Hungerford, the man he had sworn to kill, he kept the knowledge concealed save for that one flare-up. Bud Chadwell had, before all men present, refused to draw his gun. Yet the chances had been even, and if they were to judge by his appearance, this lanky man who wore his guns tied low, so advertised himself as a gunman.

For some unknown reason, Bud Chadwell had ignored a chance to burn powder. Whatever that reason was, it was not cowardice, for the tall man was plainly not of craven breed. The XIT men watched him from under low-pulled hat brims. All wondered at Powder's quick show of anger, but they puzzled more over the attitude of this man who plainly was a killer, yet refused to peddle his wares. When he spoke once more, they thought they had solved the problem.

"These Crosby boys," he said lazily, "is li'ble tuh hit at us about 'most anytime after dark. Fer the sake uh that bet I got up, Boone, don't go skylightin' yorese'f. My bet calls fer you tuh p'int this herd into Dodge. I'd shore hate tuh have yuh die off an' lose that money fer me."

The men decided then that Chadwell was sure of himself and his prowess as a gun fighter. He was holding off until the herd reached Dodge City. Then, perhaps, these two men would take up whatever personal quarrel stood between them. It was from what the two men did not say, rather than from what brief words had passed between them, that the XIT men guessed at an old enmity.

Bud Chadwell guessed that Power Boone now knew him as Tug Hungerford. He waited for some word from Boone signifying a truce until the herd reached Dodge. Powder Boone was whittling once more, his gaze fixed on the meager blaze of the buffalo-chip fire. And after a long silence, Boone's eply came, not in that indirect manner so often used by such men, but unmistakably plain, that the other man might not have a doubt as to his meaning.

"Pervidin' them Crosbys don't git one

er both of us," he said, measuring each word, "we'll ride into Dodge together. When yuh've drawed yore money, turn it over tuh yore heirs. Only one of us'll ever live tuh ride outa Dodge City, Tug Hungerford. I'm aimin' it'll be me that does the ridin'."

"Figured yuh'd read my brand afore the evenin' was done, Brad Hilton," said Chadwell slowly—almost sadly, it seemed to the listeners. "When yuh flared up a few minutes ago I knowed yuh'd got a look at my hole card. I come a-purpose tuh have a show-down. Bin a-dodgin' yuh fer a long spell now, Brad. Three-four times I'd picked me up a bunch uh cows an' some land. Then you'd drift into that section an' I'd pull stakes an' travel away.

"I was there on the Gila when you drifted into that country. I was doin' right good there. Made a lucky sale to some English Johnny an' cleared out. Got word yuh'd started up the trail with the XIT herd an' come into Dodge tuh wait fer yuh. Heered that loud-mouthed talk an' I taken the bet like I told yuh.

"I'm tuckered out a-runnin' from yuh, Brad, fer yo're the only man that ever made me quit any country. I've knowed who you was fer ten years now. I've had ten years durin' which tuh figger the deal out so's I'd know what tuh do when we met up. When I git that money offen the gambler, gimme five minutes tuh settle up my business. Then we'll meet an' git this thing over with."

"I bin waitin' a long time fer the chanct, Tug Hungerford."

"So I've heered," came the drawling reply. "Well, yuh ain't got much longer tuh wait, Brad, pervidin' one uh the Crosbys don't cut ace high on us."

"No Crosby ner no other man kin keep me from that chanct."

Powder Boone's words fell heavily on the silence. From then on, no man spoke until dusk had become darkness and the trail boss named off the men on first guard.

"I'll be out at the herd all night," he told them. "Pack yore carbines an' plenty ammunition."

Bud Chadwell, or, as Powder now called him, Tug Hungerford, also saddled an XIT horse and rode out to the herd alongside Powder Boone. Neither man spoke. There was no need for words between the two enemies.

Memory, more poignant then ever, filled the heart of Powder Boone. All the old bitter hatred surged through his viens like a fever. He wanted to be alone that he might enjoy the torture of those terrible memories that had turned a little boy into a hard-eyed man.

But always Tug Hungerford rode alongside him as they circled the herd which had not yet bedded down for the night. Fury at the man swept over Boone and he wanted to tear at the man's throat with his naked hands.

Like shadows passing across a white screen, the distorted, terrible days of his boyhood passed before Powder Boone's vision. Those days when he had gone on foot across the war-swept country that lay between Missouri and Texas. Nights when he had crawled down to farmyards and fought the hogs for precious ears of corn with which to check the terrible pains in his little stomach. He had been beaten and kicked along his way. Starving, cold, his bare feet bleeding and torn, he had struggled on, dragging his long-barreled rifle behind him.

Months followed, when he became a range waif and did all manner of hard tasks allotted to him at various cow-ranches. Finally he had become horse wrangler, then a cowboy. Now he was the best trail boss in the business.

He wanted to pour all this into the ears of Tug Hungerford who rode with him. He wanted this enemy of his to know that he, Powder Boone, had gone through hell and come out a winner; that all hell couldn't keep him from killing the last of the Hungerfords. He wanted to tell all these things to Tug Hungerford before he killed him.

Instead, he matched Tug's silence with one equally heavy. And the two men rode with drawn carbines, waiting the coming of a common enemy.

## V

"OH, BURY me not on the lone prairieeeee!" sang the voice of a cowpuncher.

Almost two hours had gone by and the steers, their paunches filled with dry grass, had bedded down to chew their cuds. Now and then one sighed like some miniature engine blowing off steam. Even the more restless ones had lain down, wearied by the day's drive. There was a new moon with a thin white line completing its circle. The sky seemed choked with stars that hung low in the wind-swept sky. The heat of the day was taking on its nightly chill and men buttoned tight their coats as they rode slowly around the herd.

"Where the coyotes howl and the wind sports free,
They laid him there on the lone prairi-ri-eeeeeee."

Rising, falling in its plaintive minor notes, the cowboy's song drifted across the sleeping herd.

"I wish to be laid—"

The flat *spat* of a rifle punctuated the broken verse that ended in a moaning gasp. The cowboy emptied his gun as he swayed in his saddle, then pitched across the neck of his horse, slumped and thudded against the sod of the prairie.

The Crosbys had opened their war.

What had been a peacefully sleeping herd was now a tearing, crashing black mass of tossing horns and thundering hoofs. The roar of the dread stampede rolled like thunder, the earth shook. Short, crimson streaks of flame spat from gun barrels in the darkness.

Every man knew what to do. That herd must be held at all costs. Their racing horses sliding along the edge of the stampede, they jerked slickers free to turn the course of that wild-eyed avalanche of death that roared and rattled. Once they succeeded in turning that "run" back upon a circular course, got the steers milling, thus tiring them out, all would be well.

This required every man of them, including the grim-eyed riders who had quit their beds at camp at the sound of the first shot and one by one, fallen into line. It would be, for some minutes, the Crosbys inning. They took advantage of it and came at a swift run, vague, swift-moving blots against the starlit sky, carbines belching brief flame.

From behind them, as if part of their raiding party, rode two horsemen. They rode abreast, separated by some ten feet. As they closed the gap between themselves and the last man in that line that rode ahead of them, they dropped tied bridle reins across their saddlehorns and stood in their stirrups. The roar of their guns blended and two Crosby men pitched from their saddles.

They fired again and two more men felt the sting of hot lead. Then the raiding party discovered the presence of this rear attack and swung to meet it, a little bewildered. The running herd rolled past and was gone.

"We split here," called Powder Boone.

"See yuh later," grunted Tug Hungerford.

They swung off in opposite directions as the Crosby faction, expecting a concentrated attack, bunched to meet it.

But no attack came. The two men who had so successfully checked the Crosby rush, had faded into the night and vanished utterly.

There followed moments of indecision on the part of the Crosbys. Then, cursing, they strung out once more.

*Spat!* The horse of a Crosby brother somersaulted, shot behind the shoulder. As Bill Crosby gained his feet, staggering, he shot at the spot from whence the telltale orange flame had slit the darkness.

Powder Boone's carbine ripped the night and Crosby dropped, shot through the thigh.

His brother rode up, jerked his running horse to a halt, and reached down to jerk the wounded man up behind him. Boone killed him as he leaned from the saddle.

Other riders tore past the wounded man and his dead brother, only to be

suddenly checked by the steady spat of Tug Hungerford's rifle—Tug, who as a boy could knock the head off a squirrel as far as he could sight it.

The wounded Crosby, crawling to the shallow shelter of a buffalo wallow, was taking snap shots at the unseen Boone every time the trail boss' spitting gun betrayed his position. But Powder Boone was shifting his position each time he fired.

The third of the Crosby brothers, cooling a bit from the first fever of bewilderment, gathered what men he could find.

"That'll be Boone, yon'er, —— 'im! Bill's holdin' 'im. Shot Boone's hoss as I rid past, not knowin' which from t'other, him er Bill. Taken a chanct an' come lucky. We got the —— dead tuh rights. Spread out, boys, an' surroun' 'im. Take yore time. No rush. Close in slow, an' keerful where yuh th'ow yore lead, 'less yuh hit each other. Git goin'."

They scattered like so many quail. All on foot now, crawling through the sagebrush. The thunder of the running herd, now dim in the distance, was as a storm that has passed. They would get the herd easy enough, once Powder Boone was accounted for properly.

Crosby had talked in a fairly loud tone of voice, sufficiently loud, at any rate, to carry in part to the ears of Tug Hungerford who lay between two tall clumps of sagebrush.

Like some long snake, he wriggled from the brush toward the spot where Powder Boone's rifle had last coughed red flame.

Time had been when little Tug Hungerford could stalk the wiliest of game with the skill of an Indian. He had lost little of that cunning. Twice only did he pause in his wriggling. Each time he went on again, he left a man bound and gagged where he had paused. Each man was unconscious; each had a rapidly rising lump on his head. Finally he called out in a peculiar drumming manner. A hunter would have known that sound as coming from a man who has hunted wild turkey. It is made by mouthing in a peculiar fashion the breastbone of that bird.

"You, Tug?" came a cautious voice, from somewhere ahead.

"Me, Brad."

"Come ahead."

And the next moment the two, Hilton and Hungerford, were sharing the slight protection of a dried up waterhole of shallow depth.

"They're a-comin' after yuh, Brad," whispered Tug.

"Let 'em. How many?

"Ten-twelve, fer a snap guess."

"*Bueno.* The more the—" His carbine crashed and off in the darkness a man groaned, then was quiet.

There was a long period of waiting. None of the men who crept toward the two cared to reveal his exact whereabouts by a chance shot.

Tug Hungerford's gun barked and a man half leaped in the air, then thudded down, groaning loudly.

"Don't shoot, Boone!" he called, as he threshed about, "I'm all shot tuh —— now. Don't murder me!"

"Shut up, yuh ——!" called Boone. "Stand up so I kin see who yuh are."

"Laig's busted!"

"Then crawl off an' die. Come on, the rest uh you skunks, I got bait fer ya all!"

Then, in a cold, impassionless voice, he cursed the Crosby clan. Cursed them in words that would make the blood of any red-blooded man boil with craving to kill the speaker. And when he had finished his list of English fighting names, he slurred into the more picturesque and vastly more vile tongue of the Mexican.

"Stand up, Powder Boone!" called the one remaining Crosby across the darkness. "No man kin call me that an' live." And the speaker got to his feet, a Colts dangling from his hand.

"I'll jest call yuh. Crosby!" called Boone, and stood on his feet, his long barreled six-shooter hanging in an easy grip. It's barrel flipped up though the gun never moved higher than Powder Boone's waist. Crosby's shot ripped at Boone's left arm. Then Crosby's knees gave way and he sank down in a heap, followed by Powder Boone's dry laugh.

Then a rattle like giant hail. Crimson flashes from half a dozen spots. But Powder Boone had been, a fraction of a second before, knocked clear off his feet by the weight of Tug Hungerford.

"Yuh ain't *plumb* bullet-proof, Brad Hilton," came in a drawling, low-pitched tone from Tug Hungerford.

A noncommittal grunt came from Powder Boone as he recovered the gun that had been jolted from his hand when Tug threw him.

So suddenly had Powder Boone dropped, the Crosby faction thought their volley had got him. They were wholly ignorant of the presence of Tug Hungerford. They came with a rush and a wild yell, eager to empty their guns in the warm body of Powder Boone.

Instead they were met by two deadly, lead-spitting six-shooters. They checked the speed of their charge; some wilted like cornstalks before a scythe; the rest fled.

"Game's done finished," said Tug Hungerford. "Hurt ary?"

"Nary. You?"

"Nope."

Both men lied. Powder Boone carried two wounds, Tug Hungerford had been hit once. Mere flesh wounds but nevertheless painful. Yet a certain ingrown pride kept them from admitting pain.

Presently some XIT riders loomed up against the background of stars. Powder Boone hailed them.

"Where's the herd?" was his first question. Cattle cost money, but men were plentiful.

"Done settled down to a walk-bawl about two mile away. Jackson's hoss come a twister with him an' busts Jackson's laig. Bob Wells is missin'. Must'a' bin him them Crosbys gits when they opens up the jackpot. How'd yuh-all come out, Powder?"

"Like we figgered," came Powder Boone's flat reply. "Come daylight, we'll load their carcasses in the wagon an' increase the tally uh Dodge City's boot-hill. Let's go tuh camp, Hungerford."

## VI

NEWS of Powder Boone's victory had trickled into Dodge City. The Crosby boys, all of them gunmen of sinister reputation, had lost. Their fickle following now waited to welcome the boss of the XIT. Even the gambler who had lost on the outcome of the trail battle, cheered by the prospect of faro-hungry cowhands, smiled silkily and waited for the coming of the XIT herd.

Men lounged about in groups of five and six discussing the affair. Though it was little past noon, a few were already well under the influence of liquor. The arrival of a trail herd was always somewhat of a holiday, and the Crosby-Powder Boone battle added spice to the festive spirit that prevailed.

Gamblers and dance-hall women, birds of Dodge City's night, blinked into the unaccustomed sunlight and chatted idly, apart from the rougher clad men of the dusty trails. Curiosity had brought them into the glaring light of day and they acted ill at ease in its revealing light. The women looked tired and a little tawdry and wholly out of place in the yellow sunlight that fell unshaded upon the wide plank walk in front of the dance-halls and saloons. The gamblers, sleek, polished, white-fingered, toyed with poker chips or a deck of cards, their eyes on the trail that came from the south.

A rumor, beginning at the Last Chance, spread up the street like some prairie fire started by a careless, solitary match.

Powder Boone, contrary to the first report, had been aided by another man in his fight against the Crosbys. Another man who had lately come from Arizona where he had lent valuable assistance to Wyatt Earp, marshal of turbulent Tombstone, in clearing that section of Arizona of its rustlers and badmen.

The name of this man ran from mouth to mouth. A name familiar enough throughout the Southwest, albeit Dodge had never known him or the deadliness of his guns first hand. A name that conjured up pictures of gun fights against any odds.

It was the name of a man whose cold nerve and quick guns had written history in a section where boys learned gun handling while still in primer grades school.

They did not call this man Tug Hungerford, nor did they know him as Bud Chadwell.

"They're sayin'," a somewhat flustered deputy told the sheriff of Dodge City who dozed in his office, "they're sayin' that 'Long Bob' was he'pin' Powder Boone when the Crosbys jumped him out."

The sheriff of Dodge was a man whose judgment was as cool as his gun hand was swift. A man of strong personality, keen judgment and steady nerve. It was said of him that he feared no man living, and this statement was well borne out by the manner in which he brought law to Dodge and kept it there when Dodge was reputed to be the wildest town on the map.

"Long Bob?" The sheriff's tone was lazily indifferent. "What of it, son?"

"It was Long Bob as lays the bet that Powder Boone'll bring the XIT herd through. Then he goes back tuh he'p Boone win the bet."

"A man's got a right to protect his chips in a game. I don't reckon he'll be hard put to collect his money."

"But supposin' he goes on a jamboree?"

"It'll be time enough then to worry, won't it?" and the sheriff smiled at the younger man whose peace of mind had been so disturbed at the mention of Long Bob.

"But hadn't we orter kinda prepare, Sheriff?"

"For what?"

"For Long Bob, dang it! He's wanted, Sheriff!"

"Son," said the sheriff of Dodge, "most of us are wanted somewhere, by somebody. I've got no orders to hold Long Bob. I've heard that him and the Earp boys had a falling out and Wyatt Earp wants him bad on some fool charge or another. You and me are here in office to keep peace in Dodge. Considering that order from all angles, it's a big enough job for us without sticking our gun barrel in Wyatt Earp's pie. Tombstone has her politics and her powder-burnin' politicians. It's a wise man that knows when to lay down his hand and keep out of a wild jackpot. Supposin' you just go on home and get some sleep. Let me handle Long Bob and Powder Boone and the XIT boys."

And with that bit of sage advice, the sheriff of Dodge stretched back in his armchair, his cool, steady eyes fastening on a cloud of dust that came up the trail from the south.

"Yonder they come!" was the word that swept Dodge City.

Out of the sluggish dust cloud came the chuck wagon of the XIT outfit, drawn by four wicked little mules.

A stone's throw ahead of the wagon rode two men, side by side.

"Powder Boone," Dodge City recognized one of the riders. "T'other is Long Bob, the Arizona killer."

The sheriff of Dodge still sat in his chair, smiling faintly, his eyes twinkling under the brim of his hat as he watched the approaching riders and the wagon.

Straight down the dusty street, the object of every pair of eyes that flanked it, rode the two men, followed by the mule drawn chuck wagon. When they came abreast of the sheriff's office they halted and Powder Boone swung to the ground and stepped into the little cabin.

"Howdy, Powder," smiled the sheriff, swinging to his feet.

"Howdy, Sheriff," returned Powder Boone, gripping the extended hand. "I brung in the three Crosby boys. They're out there in the wagon."

"Want 'em arrested, Boone?"

"Want 'em buried. We done lost the only shovel we had the other day. I'd brung Bill Crosby in alive only he died off on us comin' in. They 'lowed they was gonna take my herd offen me but they made a losin'."

"So we heard this mornin', Boone. Unload 'em at that whitewashed cabin next to the Lone Star. Doc Simmons has set up a coroner's office there but he was up all night settin' in a stud game an' he's off somewheres sleepin'. You'll find

plenty boys around to help unload 'em."

The sheriff glanced through the open doorway toward Tug Hungerford who slouched lazily in his saddle, spitting tobacco juice into the thick dust.

"Travelin' in high society, ain't yuh, Powder?"

"Meanin'?"

"Meanin' Long Bob."

"Long Bob? Where?"

"Sittin' out yonder on his horse."

"Him? Long Bob? I reckon yo're all— Hmm. Well I'll be —— if I don't think yo're right, Sheriff, come tuh look him over closter. Long Bob, eh?" Powder Boone's eyes narrowed as he studied his old enemy with fresh interest.

Powder Boone had sworn to kill Tug Hungerford, and Tug Hungerford was the notorious Long Bob against whom even the fastest gunmen had no chance. Some said that Long Bob was faster than "Wild Bill" Hickock, and those who made that assertion were men who knew whereof they spoke.

"I reckon, Sheriff," he said quietly, "I'll be gittin' them dead uns unloaded. Gotta git my wagon loaded with grub an' send it back tuh camp afore my grub slinger gits too drunk on me. See yuh later." And he turned as if to leave.

"Just a minute, Powder."

"Yeah?" Powder Boone halted.

"I'm turnin' over Dodge to you XIT boys this evenin', Powder. Take good care of 'er."

"I got a good bunch uh boys this trip, Sheriff. I don't look fer no —— raisin' tuh speak of. So long."

And Powder Boone left the sheriff sitting there as he piloted the wagon down the street to unload its grisly burden.

The sheriff sat there for some time, lost in thought. He had seen Powder Boone look through the doorway at Long Bob. What he read in Boone's eyes had given him food for thought, for if ever hate was written in the eyes of a man, it had been in Powder Boone's flecked gray eyes as they narrowed their gaze on Long Bob. The sheriff saw and wondered, and finally rose and buckled on his guns. A few minutes later he was on the street and then had disappeared. On the door of his office was a hastily scrawled note, held by a nail.

"Closed till tomorrow," was written there for those who paused to read.

## VII

"I BIN told," said Powder Boone as he and Tug Hungerford stood at the bar and Tug wadded thick rolls of banknotes into a long buckskin pouch, "that back in Arizona folks call yuh Long Bob."

"They told yuh correct," nodded Tug.

"Long Bob, the quickest gun fighter in that country," Powder persisted.

"Well," drawled Tug, "I dunno about that. There's a sayin' that no matter how fast a man is, there's always some gent a leetle quicker. A man can't never tell. I ain't aimin' tuh travel on no tough reputation."

"If you was the fastest man on earth," said Powder harshly, a brooding shadow darkening his gray eyes, "I'd still have tuh try yuh a whirl. How long will it take yuh to settle up yore affairs afore I kill yuh?"

"Yuh still aim tuh fight, Brad?"

"How long'll it take yuh?"

"Yuh still aim tuh swap lead with me, knowin' I'm a faster man than you?"

"How long'll it take yuh?" Powder Boone's lips, tight drawn, scarcely moved as he spoke in dogged repetition.

"Not more'n five minutes," replied Tug.

He asked the bartender for pen, ink and paper. When furnished with these, he retired to an empty poker table and for several minutes, bent himself to the task of writing.

The saloon had become quiet. A hush, heavy as a wet blanket laid on a dying fire, held the men who had heard the two enemies talk. Expectant, carefully aloof from the two, they waited. The scratching of Tug Hungerford's pen scraped the silence.

Powder Boone stood alone at the bar,

his back turned to the writer, staring dully into a glass filled to the brim with whisky. Tug's filled glass stood untouched on the bar. Neither man had touched liquor since his arrival.

Finally the scratching of the pen ceased. Tug Hungerford folded the note and put it inside the pouch that held his winnings. Then he rose and leisurely walked to the bar. The bartender, who had painstakingly edged out of range of any stray shot that might pass between the two, came reluctantly at Tug's nod.

"See that the sheriff gits this if I don't claim it no more," he instructed the man in an unhurried tone. "Brad, see that this gent carries out that request."

Powder Boone nodded, twirling the glass of liquor between his fingers. He was scowling thoughtfully. Tug picked up his drink.

"Well, Brad," he said, "I'm ready. We hadn't orter let this licker go tuh waste. We drunk outa the same bottle onct; dunno as there's a harm in drinkin' at the same bar, bein' it's mebbe so the last drink we'll be takin' together."

"I ain't drinkin' with the man I'm gonna kill," said Powder.

Tug drank alone, without further comment. When his glass had come back to the bar empty, Powder Boone drank. He did not look at Tug but stared straight ahead, scowling. There were men in the place who had known him long, but none had ever seen him like this.

"Where yuh want tuh die, Hungerford," he asked after quite a long silence during which Tug Hungerford leaned on his elbows, his back to the bar, drawing slowly at his cob pipe.

"I don't aim tuh die nowhere today, Brad Hilton," he said, "But there's no use clutterin' up the place. The street'll do. The sun's high enough so's neither'll have ary advantage. Supposin' we start back tuh back, walk ten steps, turn an' shoot. Our guns'll stay in the scabbard till we're facin' one another. Does that sound fair?"

Powder Boone turned and faced his enemy. His face seemed to have lost its color and his eyes were bright as if with fever.

"The other night, Tug Hungerford," he said huskily, "we was talkin'. You claimed I'd take my man's chanct an' live er die accordin'. It's come to a showdown now. Yo're a faster man than me. Don't be so —— sure I ain't gonna turn afore we take them ten steps. It's only fair tuh warn yuh."

Powder Boone paused, like a man who has been running and is out of breath. It had taken all his will power to make that confession, but something inside him that he could not explain had forced it from him. His flecked eyes were fixed on Tug Hungerford's face, studying it.

Hungerford's lips widened in a slow smile. His eyes, black, opaque, unfathomable, met Powder Boone's.

"I reckon," he said carelessly, "we'd jest as well be gettin' it over with."

And leaving Powder Boone to follow, he stalked outside, his boot-heels sounding oddly loud as he made his way to the door and stepped into the middle of the street.

Powder Boone, left alone at the bar, reached for the whisky bottle and, ignoring the formality of a glass, tipped it up and drank as if the fiery stuff were water. Then he set the bottle down, absently hitched his heavy cartridge belt and, without glancing at any one, followed Tug into the street.

Without a word, he placed himself with his back against Tug Hungerford so that their shoulder-blades touched.

Hungerford turned his head to look at the men who had followed Powder Boone from the saloon and now stood, silent and strangely awkward, on the wide sidewalk.

"You yonder," Hungerford addressed the gambler from whom he had won his bet, "you do the countin'."

The gambler, his face blank of emotion, nodded and stepped a pace from the group so that he stood on the edge of the plank walk.

"Ready, gents," he called, in that dead

monotone of a gambler calling keno numbers.

"One. Two. Three. Four—"

Clear, despite its lack of volume, the gambler's voice droned on. The two combatants, taking careful step, walked ahead, stiff backed, every nerve and muscle taut. Their arms, slightly bent at the elbow, were rigid. The right hand of each man poised clawlike above its low-holstered gun. News of the duel had spread and white faces lined the sides of the street, the bodies of the onlookers flattened against the weathered board buildings. Cowpunchers, gamblers, bull-whackers, trappers. Here and there the pallid face of a woman, the rouge on her cheeks spotting the chalky skin oddly. The length of the street was gripped in silent tensity.

"Five. Six. Seven—"

Men held their breath as the numbers left the lips of the gambler in flat monotony that was like the tolling of a bell whose clapper is muffled.

"Eight."

Those who were within distance saw the face of Powder Boone twist into horrible distortion, his lips baring like those of some animal, away from set teeth. Eyes, puckered to thin slits, his hand, like a hairy claw, crept lower toward the butt of his gun until its palm touched its yellowed ivory grip. Tug Hungerford's right hand was still several inches from its weapon, and this was an occasion where inches and the shade of a second mean life or death.

"Ni—"

The scream of a woman, high-pitched, hysterical, ripped the taut nerves of every man, combatant and spectator. Powder Boone whirled, his naked gun glinting in the sunlight. Before that swift, whirling movement was completed, the gun spat red flame down the street. Powder Boone's nerve had snapped like a broken fiddle-string.

His tall form, bent forward, knees half bent, stiffened, then swayed, though no bullet had come his way. His slitted eyes slowly widened, their bloodshot depths filming. Straightening, he slowly shoved his gun back in its holster.

For between him and the tall, upright form of Tug Hungerford, a woman lay in the thick dust of Dodge City's street. A calico-clad woman whose mass of flax colored hair was slowly reddening with blood.

Then Powder Boone's eyes lifted from the still form of the woman to the face of Tug Hungerford. In the stony, grim-lipped face of his old enemy, Powder Boone read his death sentence as surely as if it were written in black letters on parchment.

A look of pain stamped the face of the lanky Hungerford, heightening rather than softening that other look that had been there when he looked past the woman at Powder Boone.

"If she's dead," he called in a terrible voice the calmness of which sent a shiver of fear over those within earshot, "I'll kill yuh like I'd kill a mad dog. Stand where yuh are, Brad Hilton!"

And then he stepped forward to kneel in the dust, the woman's head pillowed in his lap.

The dry grief of such a man is a terrible thing to behold. Men and women hung back, awed and frightened, not daring to come near.

The blunt tips of Tug Hungerford's great hands were brushing back the woman's hair from her ashen face, in a clumsy attempt to stop the flow of blood that reddened its golden beauty. As his hands became stained, his mouth twitched as if pulled out of shape by nerves that quivered under a hot iron. His eyes, blurred as those of a drunkard, stared at the woman's face. Then a man pushed through the crowd and knelt beside Hungerford.

"I'm a doctor," he explained, then raising his voice, called for some clean water and his bag in the saloon.

Tug Hungerford did not seem to see or hear anything. As if stunned by some terriffic blow, he sat there in the dust, staring into the woman's face.

It was the gambler who brought water

and the doctor's black kit-bag. As he worked over the woman, the crowd, shuffled into the street. Powder Boone standing alone, found himself surrounded by a crowd that left him in the center of its circle. There were drawn guns in that crowd and, while no man spoke a word of threat, Powder Boone knew that he stood near death. The crowd shut Tug Hungerford and the woman from his view.

He was no longer pale and his nerves were once more steady as steel strings. As his flecked eyes swept the mob, he smiled at them with cold contempt.

"I'm not goin' to run, if that's what yuh think, yuh —— pack of whelps!"

Thumbs hooked in his sagging belt, he eyed them coldly.

Then a woman's voice, half sobbing, broke across the silence:

"Brad! Braddie, boy!"

Powder Boone started, the smile wiped from his lips.

"Braddie bud! Where is he?"

Ignoring the drawn guns, shaking as if stricken by a chill, Powder Boone stepped through the crowd that parted for him.

Those of Dodge City who were there to look saw that which brought tears to their eyes.

For Powder Boone, sobbing like a child, knelt beside the woman he had shot, his hands touching her as one might touch the garment of a saint.

"Sukie! Good God, it's sister Sukie!"

"Braddie! Braddie, sonnie, don't!"

"The bullet grazed her scalp," Tug Hungerford was saying. "You was shootin' fer my heart, I reckon. Sukie bein' about head high tuh my chest. She's gonna live, Brad."

The doctor stood up. With a quick gesture, he dissipated the crowd that, seemingly of a single notion, headed for the open doorway of the nearest saloon. The two men and the laughing, sobbing woman were left there sitting in the dust.

Tug Hungerford, his big arm about Sukie's shoulder, held her gently while they waited for Brad Hilton's terrible grief to sob itself out—the grief that had been locked in his heart for many years, silent and stifled, and therefore the more terrible.

And when he had done sobbing and huddled there, his head buried against the breast of his older sister who had been a sort of mother to him back there in the backwoods of Missouri, Tug Hungerford talked.

"It's my fault, Brad, more'n it is yourn. I should uh told yuh me'n Sukie's bin married fer years. Her'n Sissy run off together, yuh see. When I come on 'em, nigh ten years later, they was workin' in a Abilene dance-hall. I taken 'em both away. Sissie—died a few months later. I buried her 'longside ma, at the ranch on the Pecos. Me'n' Sukie got married then. Barrin' them times when I knowed you was gittin' hot on my trail an' we had tuh move on, we bin shore happy. Our oldest young un's named fer yuh, Brad.

"Sukie didn't know Powder Boone was Brad Hilton. I never let 'er know, fer I figgered some day I'd have tuh kill yuh er be killed. ——, she scares the young uns tuh sleep tellin' 'em Powder Boone'll git 'em.

"I aimed tuh tell yuh about us, Brad. That's why I come to yore outfit. Then I read yore heart an' I knowed that no matter what I said er done, you was gonna carry on that —— fool feud that taken good men an' good boys uh both sides. So I kep' my mouth shet.

"I aimed tuh shoot yore gun outa yore hand afore yuh could shoot me. Then I was gonna tell yuh about me'n Sukie an' fetch yuh to that new home we're gonna make somewheres. I was—"

"I told yuh I'd turn afore that ten steps, Tug!" Brad burst out hoarsely. "I told yuh I was a —— bushwhacker!"

"An' yuh never spoke a bigger lie in yore life, Brad. Yuh'd uh played 'er square, only fer Sukie screamin'. Yore nerves was too high-strung. Yuh knowed I was faster'n you with a shootin' iron an' yuh figgered yuh was as good as committin' suicide. That scream uh her'n jest snapped yore nerves, that's all. Now yo're comin' over tuh play with

them four kids uh our'n an' git a look at young Brad. He's gonna be a dead ringer fer yuh, ain't he, Sukie? Even his eyes is powdermarked like your'n."

As the woman walked down the street, each arm holding one of the two men who a short time before had faced each other with drawn guns, the windows that flanked the street were filled with curious faces.

"Sukie," asked Tug, "who told yuh about the fight comin' off?"

"The sheriff was ridin' past our camp on his way outa town. He told me that Powder Boone was gonna kill Long Bob an' that mebbe if I went over town, I could spoil the fight."

"Powder Boone," said Tug, smiling broadly, "is dead. So's Long Bob. But Brad Hilton an' Tug Hungerford is gonna live on fer a spell, raisin' cows. Me'n' Brad, between us, win a big bet that'll buy a nice bunch uh dogies. Me'n' Sukie'll pick yuh out a nice, purty gal tuh tie to so's tuh kinda slow 'im down, won't we?"

"I'm willin'," grinned Brad. "Time I was hitched, I reckon, with one uh these fancy apron string tie-knots."

And, as the three passed out of sight, Dodge City caught the sound of the first laugh that had passed Brad Hilton's lips since he was a boy.

"Tonight," prophesied the gambler, "unless I'm losing my knack of reading sign, is going to be about the biggest old Dodge has seen for some moons. Line up folks, the house is buyin'!"

# *Scrooby*

BY

LEONARD H. NASON

SCROOBY was assigned to A Troop of the 18th Cavalry shortly after the outbreak of the war. He came with a bunch of recruits from Columbus Barracks. He had lived with his father in the interior of the Georgia mountains, and when his father died, at the immature age of ninety-eight, Scrooby set out to see the world. He had never seen a railroad train, a steamboat, an automobile or a repeating rifle until he arrived in the settlements in the foothills of his native mountains.

It was at this time that he first learned of the war, and when I met him, some two months after he had enlisted, he was still firmly convinced that the war was against the —— Yanks. He told me that he had chosen the cavalry because his father had fought in the cavalry under General Mosby during the Civil War, and consequently Scrooby felt more familiar with that branch of the Service than with any other.

Scrooby could not read or write and had no desire to learn.

"If I kain't read or write," said he, "I'll never git to readin' no trashy literature an' no trashy books, nor forging any checks and gettin' myself into all kinds of trouble."

Our Army, at this period of its training, was overrun with the fad of buzzer and semaphore signaling. General orders had been issued that every man must be proficent in both methods of communication. The first sergeant of my troop had a grudge against me at that time and he assigned Scrooby to my platoon, so that I would be responsible for his instruction in wigwag and buzzer.

I know of lots of easier jobs than teaching a man to read semaphore signals when the man doesn't even know the alphabet. We got along, however, to the point where Scrooby could tell the letter "N." That was the only signal that he knew. Of course when the regiment was inspected by the brigade commander, Scrooby had to be the only man who was questioned on semaphore signals. Scrooby didn't know a single one that the brigadier waved at him.

"Haven't you been instructed in semaphore signaling?" asked the general.

"Yes, sir," replied Scrooby.

"Well, why haven't you learned more of the signals?"

"Well," replied Scrooby, "I guess the man that was learnin' me was kind of no-account."

There was one thing that Scrooby could do exceptionally well and that was shoot craps. He borrowed from me one day five dollars and went over to the 19th Cavalry, who had just been paid. He returned in about twenty minutes with eighty dollars, forty of which he gave me because I had staked him.

He never went to France. When we were in Camp Shelby, Mississippi, he had a fit of homesickness and disappeared one night without asking permission. We never heard of him again.

*Going on with*

# *The Devil's Castle*

FIVE hundred miles up the Orinoco, the Devil's Castle, a great, black, pinnacled rock, held the secret of ancient Spanish booty and, according to Raffaele Dussault, it held the treasure as well. With a tale of gold and jewels hidden there by his own ancestors, when starvation and perhaps cannibalism had interrupted their flight from the Andes, he lured Julian Marden, a young American, from the Florida land boom.

The two men pooled their money into passage and a light outfit. As commercial travelers they boarded a river *piragua*. Going up the Orinoco Dussault confessed that a weakness for liquor and women had forestalled his previous attempts at the treasure. Sighting Las Tetas, two round black hills, they prepared to leave the ship. Dussault doped the tea for the crew and, while all slept, the two travelers departed in the captain's canoe.

The only access to the treasure-rock was by a creek, a canoe journey filled with difficulty. Marden saved Dussault from a deadly electric eel. The first night's camp was visited by a jaguar. They discovered a canoe which verified the legend that men had come up the creek and been snatched away. The barking of a dog and the sudden appearance of a man on the bare Tetas irritated Dussault. He acted queerly. Marden grew apprehensive and asked him what he had done with the sleeping powders after he had dosed the native crew.

"I dropped the bottle over the side—with the cork out," said Dussault.

"Oh! Gave them the whole dose, eh?"

"You bet—enough to turn the trick."

Reassured, Marden slept through that night's camp.

# ARTHUR O. FRIEL'S *Serial of a Treasure Chase up the Orinoco*

## VII

MARDEN awoke at daybreak, to stretch, sit up briskly and arise full of vigor. For fully eleven hours he had slept undisturbed. Now the stiffness of yesterday was gone from his muscles, the residue of fatigue toxin from his blood and brain, and he felt fit. With a smiling glance at his dormant partner, he opened the tent-flap and stepped forth, to take a comprehensive survey of the surroundings and breathe deep of the fresh air.

If any *tigre* or other sinister prowler had scouted the camp it had left no trace. The hard, dry ground, lightly littered with dead leaves, was barren of life or of vestiges of visitors. Perhaps the jaguar across the creek, finding the camp site deserted, had deemed the campers gone from the region; or perhaps it had made a kill elsewhere and had forgotten them. At any rate, it now seemed no longer to exist.

Marden stretched himself again; then flexed all his muscles in setting-up exercise. Thereafter he built a coffee-fire, meanwhile whistling the piercing notes of reveille.

Dussault appeared, yawning, but moving with less effort than at any time since entering the Caño del Muerto.

"Ah, here's his royal fatness now," Marden informed the universe at large. "Spry on his legs this morning, too."

"Fatness nothing!" grinned the black-jawed man, slapping himself. "Look, my belt's up two whole notches and going another!"

True enough, the indrawn strap attested a noticeable reduction in girth, as did also the waist-wrinkled trousers dependent from it.

"I apologize," bowed Marden. "And I'll shrink you another notch by night or leave your corpse by the wayside. Now crack a can of beans or something, and we'll pull out of here."

Dussault, after a leisurely look at his serene environment, stepped back to open the requisite tin. Breakfast followed speedily. Then, under the slant rays of the uprolling sun, they walked to the canoe, carrying only paddles and the binoculars.

"Everything's as safe here as it would be with us—maybe more so," Marden declared. "Even if anybody came up the *caño* he couldn't see the tent back here in the trees. And there's not much chance of anybody coming, anyway."

Settling themselves in the boat, they pulled away with lusty strokes. The air of the shadowed stream was cool; the sun brightly welcome after the long night; the action of their refreshed muscles, a physical pleasure; the hope of discovering something important, a mental stimulant; and the distance to the selected lookout could not be long, since the stream obviously curled close around the castle hill. Obstacles proved few and the current gentle. For all its ominous name and reputation, Dead Man's Creek this morning seemed a pleasant place.

In a steady curve, it led them around

to the base of the precipice on which they had stood yesterday. There it veered away, shouldered aside by bulky stones which, at some ancient time, had fallen to lie and be eroded into rounded forms by the scouring sediment of countless floods. Black, these were, like the parent cliff and the soaring Castillo, stained uniformly by the action of tropic dew. After a comprehensive glance or two the paddlers gave attention to the water, guarding against collision with any slightly submerged stone which might lie in wait. They had nearly passed the cliff when Marden, looking aside once more, turned his broad steering-blade to arrest progress.

"Hey, Rafe! There's a cave!"

Dussault suspended motion. Together they scanned the cavern-mouth which, heretofore concealed by intervening bowlders, now gaped at them. The orifice was not large; an ellipse perhaps ten feet long by seven in height. Its lower jaw was some four feet above the present level of the creek. Within was vacancy, a deeper black than that of the blank stone face about it.

"Worth looking into," suggested Dussault, a note of excitement in his tone.

"You bet!"

They swung the canoe and surged to shore. Low stones, a foot or two out of water, offered firm footing and safe hold for the canoe. With the prow lifted to rest on one of these, they stepped swiftly to the opening and peered within.

Nothing met their eyes; nothing but smooth walls vanishing into density. Both pulled themselves up and in, to stand again, looking. The floor of the natural tunnel ran almost level as far as they could see. It was bare, with a thin layer of fine earth filming its stone. They walked inward a few yards, then paused, growing cautious. Their own bodies, intercepting much of the light from behind them, increased the darkness ahead. There was no knowing what might lie there; nor, since they could not see, was there much sense in going farther to investigate.

"We'd better go back—" began Dussault, and stopped, astonished by the loudness of his voice in the hollow space.

"Go back to camp and get the flashlight, you mean," Marden finished for him, in milder tone.

"Correct!" Dussault spoke even more loudly this time, vexed at himself. "Get a light and look at the bowels of this thing."

"All right. Come on."

They turned back and strode toward the canoe, their imaginations kindling at each step. Farther in, perhaps, existed some large room wherein might lie the long-hidden hoard—and crumbled skeletons of the ancient freebooters who had brought it here, to die rather than to surrender. But then again—Marden nearly stumbled as the grim thought smote him—this might be the lair of the Thing which stalked this land and snatched bold men into utter oblivion. Who knew?

A yard from the outer edge he involuntarily jerked his head around to reassure himself that no such Thing was already reaching after them. Then, almost instantaneously, he sprang upward, whirling in air like a cat, hand streaking to his gun.

"Rafe! Look out!" he gasped.

Dussault wheeled in a flash, drawing as he spun. The vacant darkness had borne life—and death. On the grayish earth carpet where they had just walked was a long black shape, sliding straight at their feet, a snake, venomous, vindictive, roused by their voices and infuriated by their intrusion.

Half a dozen shots crashed in a deafening volley. Then, both men were outside on the rocks, with no knowledge of how they had sprung there; both still facing the cavern, guns up, fingers tense on ready triggers. Inside, just at the brink, the reptile shuddered in futile reflex movement, eyes still fixed on its escaped prey, body shattered in two places.

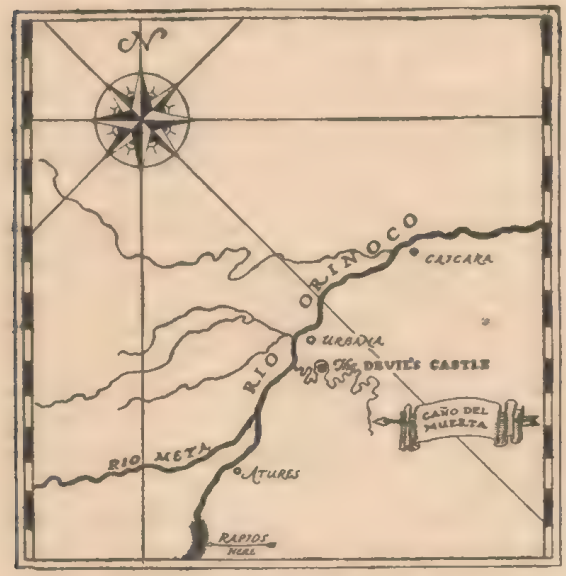
"*Dios!* That was close!" muttered Dussault, letting his weapon sink. Then, as his partner took deliberate aim at the

deadly head, he quickly added, "No no, Jule, don't shoot him any more. I want the skin."

Marden gave him a sidewise stare, but lowered his gun. Dussault looked about for a stick, found one among the rocks, and with it lifted forth the quivering form. It slipped off and fell, and he dodged away from it; then, angered, hit it hard with the stick, giving it final quietus. Thereafter he straightened it out and inspected it.

"Six feet long, if he's an inch," he declared, in a pleased tone. "And handsome, isn't he?"

"Handsome is that handsome does," dryly replied the lean man, eying the




creature with interest but with no admiration. Seen in the sunlight, it proved to be not black but blue, with large patches of darker blue along its back; slender, speedy-looking and, in its way, shapely. But, torn and bloody and vicious, it held no beauty for the northerner.

"What is it?" he asked.

"I'm not sure. But I think he's what they call *dalle*—scythe—down here; the worst snake in this country, because he will chase a man to kill him, and when he strikes it's sure death. They told me about that fellow when I was down here before. Well, we'll take him along and I'll strip him later. Souvenir, you know. But when we come back we'll need to be careful. He probably has a mate somewhere in there."

"And the female of the species is more deadly, and so on."

Marden eyed the black hole with disfavor. Then he ejected his empty shells, replaced the unfired ones, and refilled the vacant chambers with fresh loads from a pocket. Snapping the cylinder home, he reentered the canoe, to sit watching Dussault. The latter, grasping the body by the tail, threw it in amidships. Marden shoved it forward with his paddle. Dussault grinned, lifted the bow free and stepped in with new-born agility. The dugout swung about and, urged by purposeful power, sped down the *caño* to camp.

There, while Marden obtained the required light, Dussault draped his prize over low branches of a tree; and as they returned to the canoe he looked back, as if afraid some mischance might befall it. Marden eyed him oddly, but said nothing. Every man had his hobbies, he told himself; and if Dussault fancied the acquisition of snake-skins he would not object so long as the snakes within them were not alive. With that he put his mind on the waiting cavern.

Once more outside that dark portal, they stood a minute or two, looking before entering. No other reptile was in sight. Marden inspected the torch—a tubular two-cell spotlight, more powerful than the little pocket night-light used across the *caño*—and found it instantly responsive. Thereupon he climbed in.

"This devil-castle of yours certainly has plenty of guards," he drawled. "A man-killing eel at the river end of the moat, a man-eating tiger walking the woods, a man-hunting snake at the postern gate. What next, d'you suppose?"

"The devil only knows." Dussault scowled into the darkness.

"Well, we'll find out. But it's a good thing we're hard-headed. If we believed in transmigration or metempsychosis, or whatever they call it, we could easily

fancy that all these bad actors were the spirits of the old die-hards who stuck to their treasure to the last, and that they're still sticking, maybe waiting for that old cannibal to come back in another body so they can get him for eating them—What's the matter?"

Dussault had sucked his breath sharply through his teeth. Now his face was pallid, his eyes dilated. At Marden's sharp query he gulped.

"Put on—your light! There—in there—what's that?"

Marden snapped on the switch instantly. The white beam shot through the gloom, revealing nothing but naked rock, roof and walls and dusty floor.

"Something moved," added Dussault, in a choked voice. After a moment of watching, however, he forced a laugh.

"My own shadow, maybe," he confessed. "Come on. But watch out—and keep those ghastly thoughts to yourself until we're out of here. Caves always make me nervous."

"Humph!" grunted Marden. Dussault reddened. But he did not advance until his companion moved; and then he walked, not abreast, but a pace at the rear, watching every inch of the tunnel as the constantly shifting light played over all its concavities.

Step by step they moved on, scanning everything above, below and aside, but finding nothing new. The tunnel curved gently to one side or the other, contracted here and there, expanded again, but retained approximately the same grade—a gentle slope downward. The air seemed damp and, as they trudged along, almost clammy. Yet it was pure and odorless; the powder-gases of the recent shooting had drifted outside the entrance, and no others emanated from the hidden interior. If any other snake tenanted the place it seemed now to have fled from the shocks of the explosions, for no menacing shape slid along the dirt or reared itself in the path. Searching light and watchful eyes found only utter barrenness.

Then came another light; a drab light lying along the corridor beyond a curve, which strengthened quickly as still another bend was passed; the natural light of day, dropping through some hole, above and beyond. Toward this unseen opening the adventurers pressed on more rapidly—to come to an abrupt halt. The hole was not only above, but below. And the tunnel had ended.

Before their feet yawned a gulf, not very wide, but deep and black. Beyond it stood sheer rock, the wall of a natural shaft, the top of which was out of sight; for above the heads of the explorers protruded a blunt overhang, obstructing upward view. Unlike the tunnel, this chimney was rough, jagged, deeply scored, as if hewn through the stone by some gigantic hammer. From concealed crest to invisible base it dropped without an opening other than that where the explorers now stood. The visionary treasure-chamber with its skeleton guard was a hole of futility.

"Humph!" grunted Marden again, his voice preternaturally loud in the vaulted hush. He turned the search-ray downward, to meet only bafflement. The stone at his toes did not drop straight, but pitched outward at a steep slant—too steep to stand upon—before falling away; so there, as overhead, vision was blocked.

Dussault, after vainly seeking a small stone to throw, drew out a silver *bolívar* and tossed the coin beyond the brink. Both listened intently for its impact. Several seconds passed. Then sounded, not the clink of collision with stone nor the bump of a fall on earth, but a dull plop.

"A long drop, and water at the end," he interpreted. "We've drawn blank again. Let's get out of here, before—" He bit off the rest.

"Before what?"

"Well, before some cursed thing sneaks in behind us to drive us off the edge here."

The suggestion made Marden wheel and flash the light behind. Once turned, he did not turn back. There was nothing

more to see, and the dank atmosphere chilled him. Saying nothing, he strode outward, watchful as before, Dussault close beside him.

They met nothing. Once more at the entrance, each drew a long breath. Then they smiled at each other. Dropping over the edge, they stepped to the canoe and got aboard.

"Well, we've learned where our treasure isn't, and that's something," philosophically remarked Marden. "And we had a little adventure and a fine cool walk, and the whole show cost us only one *bolívar*, twenty cents, a fifth of a dollar. Cheap at the price, I call it."

His companion made no reply. Moodily he shoved out and pulled away. Marden sunk his own paddle, and thereafter the pair swayed in easy rhythm, heading for the swamp and the bare-faced hill beyond.

## VIII

BY THE time the dugout reached the base of the selected cliff of observation Dussault was himself again. The partners had passed through the swamp without seeing anything of interest—some little lizards, a few small birds pursuing insects, a high-flying parrot or two—and now, with a new bit of exploration in immediate prospect, the occurrences at the cave faded from mind. As the pair debarked beside the tall precipice the bowsman rubbed a hand along his belt, looked aloft, and chuckled.

"Here goes another half-inch of my front lot."

Without awaiting reply, he plodded into the woods, glasses dangling from their neck-strap, paddle held ready to shove aside brambles or to strike at any small reptile encountered. Marden tied the boat and followed. After working through the waterside fringe they reached a steep but sparsely treed hillside, up which they toiled. The ground was irregular, and their random route was blocked here and there by vertical outcrops or by clumps of long-fanged cactus, necessitating detours. Marden ascended with little effort, but Dussault puffed, wheezed, and paused occasionally to catch breath, while perspiration exuded from him like water from a sponge. For all that, he climbed with determination and without grunt or groan of complaint.

Reaching the top, they found it well wooded except at the brink, where bare stone offered good footing, clear vision and uninterrupted breeze. For a minute or two they gave scant attention to the vista for which they had worked so hard.

Marden drank deep of the moving air and mopped eyes dimmed by sweat. Dussault sagged, hands on knees, pumping new breath into laboring lungs; then he straightened, doffed his saturated shirt and spread it on the stone to dry. Naked to the waist, he stood bulky and brigandish; swarthy-skinned, black-bristled of jaw, black-furred of arm and chest, unconsciously belligerent as he overcame fatigue and eyed the antagonistic Castillo. Given a red kerchief, sash and brace of ancient pistols, he might have personified any of those long-lost Spaniards who, perhaps, had stood on this very spot before him.

So thought Marden, whimsically glancing over him before turning his attention to the castle. Dussault, however, seemed unaware of any such resemblance. When his breathing became normal he picked up the binoculars and focused them in a matter-of-fact way on the turreted rock.

Marden, squinting between cupped hands, learned practically as much with unaided eyes as Dussault with his magnifiers; for the slanting sun struck upon the latter's lenses at a troublesome angle which almost nullified their clarity. Both gazers saw plainly enough that the sheer drop from the black towers to the *caño* offered no line of passage—this they had already ascertained while paddling hither—and that the western side also was a barren hope.

The eastern slant was virtually beyond vision; only its end, with the flanking tall trees, could be seen, and that rather vaguely. The top, now approximately on

a level with the spot where the observers stood, revealed only a configuration similar to that seen from other points—several disordered spires standing funereally against the glaring sky.

After a long scrutiny both men desisted, to rest strained eyes.

"Find anything good?" queried Marden.

"No. Not yet. The sun murders my eyes."

"Mine too. Well, let's go back a bit into the shade. That may help some."

Under the canopy of a spreading tree, Marden took the glasses; rested them against the trunk of a sturdy sapling, readjusted the focus to the utmost sharpness, and gazed with deliberate concentration on every detail. The shutting off of the sun increased clearness and eased vision. After a time he spoke out quickly.

"Rafe! There's a bump on the east side, about a quarter-way down, that looks like the end of a shelf—curving out below, flat on top, and fairly wide. Take a look!"

Dussault complied. True enough, the projection was as described by the discoverer. If it really was a shelf and if it led to the top—

"But how are we to get up there?" he demanded. "There's no hold on that smooth stuff below."

"The trees, man! They grow right against the rock, some of them, and they all have branches."

"By —— Jule, you've got it! That's the way!"

"It's the way if there is any way. And we'll sure find out! But of course that may be just a short bump that doesn't go anywhere, and—"

"Never mind if it is. There may be others. And we'll do some tree climbing anyway. Let's go!"

Exultantly he turned to the left, heading downhill with quick strides, forgetful of paddle and shirt. Marden, though also jubilant, kept his head.

"As you were!" he called. "Keep your shirt on. And come here with those glasses. I want another look."

Dussault voiced an impatient grunt, but returned. Handing over the binoculars, he stepped out and retrieved his garment and both paddles; then stood waiting while his comrade reinspected the distant projection. Satisfied, the latter presently lowered the twin tubes and stepped forward. But, struck by an afterthought, he stopped and raised them once more, training the lenses now on the looming Tetas. For a minute he stood very still.

"Humph! The plot thickens again," he said, his voice hard-edged. "Come take another look, Rafe—at that Teta over yonder."

"Somebody watching?" snapped Dussault.

"Look," repeated Marden. The other, scowling deep, dropped the paddles and seized the extended glass.

The sliver which Marden had seen on the great egg the other day was not there now, but in its place was a wart, visible to the naked eye. Through the glasses it became a man, seated, hunched up, motionless, facing the Castillo. At that distance small details were not clear; but the squat shape seemed to hold hands before its face, and to hold something in those hands. Its rigidity betokened fixed attention.

"Spy!" hissed Dussault. "—— your eyes! I hope the sun strikes you blind! Come over here, you sneak, and I'll blow you to —— in a hurry, and your whole —— gang with you! Come on, you lousy ——!"

His voice shook with sudden fury, so venomous that Marden stared. For the moment, at least, he meant every word of it. Had his gun possessed the reach of his glass, he would have shot that distant man dead as he sat.

"It looks to me," ventured Marden, after a moment, "as if that bird had an old spy-glass of some kind and was using it on us. He couldn't see us without one; we're not on the sky-line. And otherwise why would he roast up there in the sun?"

"That's just what he's doing!" Dussault broke in. "The —— snake! We

ought to have gone over there that night the dog jowled and shot up the whole lay-out! They've gotten on to us somehow and— Well, let 'em come!" His teeth showed ferociously. "I hope to —— they do! They'll get a bellyful!"

Again Marden stared. Was this the man who had quaked before shadows an hour ago?

As Dussault lowered the glasses his yellow eyes blazed. One hand went longingly to his revolver while he continued to glare at the inaccessible watcher. Then he strode forth into full sunlight, the better to be seen, and gestured in a way inimitably Latin and inexpressibly insulting. So far as could be discerned, the faraway wart made no response.

"Keep your shirt on, Rafe," advised Marden again. "They'll never come in here. Too much work. Maybe when we go out they'll lay for us, but now that we're on to them it'll be an even break. Meanwhile we've more important things to figure on."

So saying, he grasped the paddles and ambled downward. Dussault, growling something, gestured once again, then followed. When they reached the canoe the entire Teta had vanished from their sight, swallowed by the uprising country close around them. With its disappearance Dussault recovered good humor. He even laughed at himself.

"You'd think I was old Pirate Blackbeard in truth, to hear me talk, wouldn't you?" he grinned, pulling on his shirt and tucking it in negligently. "Blood and gunpowder, eat 'em alive, hang 'em to the yardarm, and so on. If a tough bunch did come in here I'd probably run."

"Which way? Away from 'em or at 'em?" smiled Marden.

"Well, that might depend on how I felt at the time."

"Most things do," sapiently observed the steersman, taking his seat.

"There's truth in that," nodded the other. "If we had no feelings life would be much simpler. But it would be horribly monotonous. Well, we're off."

He loosed the rope, stepped in, and shoved away. Once more afloat, he stroked deliberately, almost laggardly, as if intentionally restraining impatience to reach the Castillo, compelling mind and muscle to undergo discipline. Moreover, he looked all about him as he traveled, feigning total lack of interest in the treasure rock looming ahead. Marden, watching with some puzzlement, presently nodded understanding and sympathy. Twice this morning the burly man had given way to sudden feeling—first to baseless fear, then to savage rage; and now he was ashamed of his self-betrayal and determined to enfore control.

It was rather tough on Rafe, thought the pilot, to undergo all this abstinence and toil after the sensuous life he was accustomed to. No wonder his nerves jumped through his skin sometimes! A couple of good drinks—or maybe a whole good drunk—would do him a world of good. Too bad that there wasn't some liquor down at camp. They ought to have brought along a quart of that good Maracaibo rum; but Dussault would have killed it long ago if they had. Well, he was standing up like a man, anyway.

"Say, Jule," Dussault's voice broke in on his musings, "what d'you suppose made that?"

The canoe was halfway through the swamp now; the *caño* deep and muddy; the low land on either side overgrown with knee-high grass and scattered bush. At their left that grass was pressed down in a path, perhaps two feet wide, leading from the water inland.

"Search me. Alligator, maybe," hazarded Marden. "What of it?"

"I don't think it's a 'gator. We haven't seen any in here. Let's take a look."

"Oh, come on! Why waste time? We can come here any time, and right now we—"

"Ha! Look! *Culebra!*"

Dussault's excited yell blended with a loud swash of water as he bore back hard on his paddle, stopping the boat. Fifteen or twenty feet away, at one side of the

path, had risen a head; a blunt, reptilian head which now hung poised just above the grass.

"Hold her, Jule—hold her steady!"

With the words he dropped his paddle and snatched out his gun. Leveling it across his left elbow, he took quick but careful aim. Marden held his paddle rigid. Dussault fired.

The head dropped. The grass waved violently. Into it the bowman fired again and again—four times. Holding his last cartridge, he stood up and peered eagerly across the interval. The disturbance in the grass subsided to feeble quiverings.

"I got him!" he shouted. "He's there!"

"Sit down!" barked Marden. "You're rocking the boat. We'll both be overboard in a minute."

The excited man obeyed, grabbing up his paddle again. They pushed the clumsy craft to shore. Marden jabbed at the ground to test its firmness, and found it substantial enough. Dussault scrambled out, grinning joyously, but, at his fellow's command, paused long enough to lift the bow on earth. Then both of them walked to the shuddering grass.

There, weakly twitching, lay a big dark snake, or small serpent, some ten or twelve feet in length. Spasmodic tremors ran along its body, but only its tail was actually moving. Unlike the reptile killed at the cave, it looked sluggish and heavy; a thick-bodied thing, apparently not created for speedy travel. Its head, too, was shaped differently, lacking the flat triangularity of the venomous *dalle*. Some sort of constrictor, Marden judged, which killed its prey by crushing.

"Boy, isn't he a whale?" chortled Dussault. "A small one, I'll admit, but as big as I care to peel. And the skin will look three times as wide when it's flattened out!"

"Oh, let the thing rot!" remonstrated Marden.

"I will not! I will take the skin!"

The refusal came short, hard, combative. Marden sniffed, then shrugged.

"Oh, well, all right. But you won't load him into the canoe. I won't have it. He stinks. Leave him here and come back when you're ready."

"I will not leave him here. We can tow him—tie the rope on him, and paddle stern first; it's no harder. Do you know what he is? I do. *Culebra de agua*—water snake—anaconda. You seldom see one, because they travel mostly by night; they hide all day in shady places or in mud. So their skins are rare. This one is young and foolish. Otherwise he'd be in cover. Maybe he was moving to the woods over there when we came along. But— Say, this must be a snake path here! That's it! There's some big pool over there, and more snakes—bigger ones—"

"Come on, let's get out of here, then!" Marden eyed the crushed grass in repugnance. "If they're bigger than this—I'm on my way!"

He stalked back to the canoe. Dussault jabbed his gun into its pouch, clutched the boa around the neck, and hauled at it. The weight of the creature evoked a grunt of surprize, and for a second he faltered. Then, gripping harder and digging heels into the soft ground, he put his own weight to work, progressing backward to the creek and dragging the ponderous carcass. On reaching the rope he knotted it tightly around the scaly neck, then heaved the body into the water.

"There, baby, now papa takes you for a little ride," he laughed, panting from his exertion, but happy as a child with a new toy. "Come along nicely and don't you cry, you'll be a souvenir by and by."

His chanted doggerel and throaty mirth brought a responsive smile to Marden's set lips. And as they resumed their journey, with the lean man now acting as bowman of the reversed curial, he reproached himself for opposing his mate's desires. What if Rafe did delay the big game a few minutes by his odd hobby? There was time to burn, and if he could find any fun here he was entitled to it.

"A snake's as good as a drink to him,"

he thought. "Better, because it gives him a good kick with no headache. We don't need a rum bottle, after all."

They swung along downstream, both good-humored once more. Behind, the close-tied serpent slid smoothly in the wake. Before, the diabolical castle looked down at them with fixed frown. And over at the edge of the dense woods at the left, where the grass-path ended at a deep-shadowed pool, two creatures, disturbed by the reverberating concussions of the gunfire, held up their heads and moved slowly along the muddy rim; reptiles compared to which the young serpent now trailing down the *caño* was but a worm.

## IX

DESPITE Marden's resolve to humor his partner's eccentricities, he found his patience slipping again when, back at camp, the snake-fancier insisted upon skinning his prizes immediately.

Now that a possible route up the hitherto unscalable Castillo awaited investigation, the waste of valuable time at such worthless work seemed downright idiocy. Yet it was characteristic of the man who, knowing of the legendary treasure, never had been able to conquer his impulses long enough to bring himself alone to its hiding place.

The urge of the moment had ever been the strongest influence in his life. More than once in Florida he had let an important deal slip through his fingers by allowing some distraction—usually feminine—to absorb all his attention at the wrong time. Even when he actually succeeded in landing on Venezuelan soil, transitory desires had, according to his own confession, undermined his purpose and ruined his chances of proceeding farther. And now a pair of ophidian trophies bulked larger in his mind's eye than the wealth of El Dorado.

"If I don't strip them now they'll spoil," he argued. "And the castle won't vanish while I am doing it. And it's almost noon, and a bad time of day to look up at that rock. The sun strikes straight down into your eyes. In an hour or two it will be on the other side and won't blind us, and we can work in the shade. We'd better not rush."

All this was true. But the thought of further delay for the sake of those reptiles exasperated Marden, and it was with some difficulty that he repressed caustic comments, which would have done no good. As his obstinate companion straightened out the cave-snake and opened a pocket-knife he turned his back on the forthcoming operation.

Into the tent he went, to open the first can he found in the food-box and spooned its contents into his mouth. As he squatted, chewing, he put his thoughts on matters more sensible—and more appetizing—than the present occupation of his erratic mate. By the time the can was empty and his stomach full he was ready to proceed with practical measures.

Walking to the canoe, he pulled its bow well up on a low stone beside the shore; then detached the line hitherto used as painter. This was over-long and over-strong for its present use; a cable of tough *chiquechique* palm fiber which Ramón had acquired somewhere and been unwilling to cut. Some thirty feet over all, and more than an inch thick, it would be an excellent rope for climbing, if need for it should arise.

He coiled it, slung it over one shoulder, and returned to the tent; picked up the hatchet and walked away toward the Castillo.

"I'm going to start business," he curtly informed Dussault in passing. "Come along when you're ready."

"All right."

Dussault hardly glanced up from his work, which he was finding somewhat more tedious than he had expected. His knife was not as sharp as it should be, and the ventral scales of the *dalle* were thick and hard.

Marden plodded on up the hill. A minute or two later Dussault's hands paused. He looked after the departing treasure-hunter; arose, followed to the

edge of the trees, and narrowly watched him clamber along under his load; then he eyed the Castillo. Marden did not look back. Presently the watcher retraced his steps in haste and resumed his half-done task with even more haste, cutting and peeling with little of his former deliberate care. Somehow the sight of his partner preparing to ascend to the presumptive cache of gems made him uneasy.

When the hide was off he hung it hurriedly over the convenient branch, hurled the carcass into the *caño*, washed his hands with more speed than precision, and bolted some food. Then, leaving the other snake untouched, he marched rapidly up the slope.

Meanwhile Marden had not loitered along the way to gaze and guess at the extent of the problematical shelf, but proceeded unhesitatingly to the gulf end of the block, where he knew that provocative "bump" to exist. There he dropped his rope-coil and began reconnaissance, studying the soaring trees alongside the wall. A number of these were hardwoods of great age, seemingly shallow-rooted, yet almost as immovable and enduring as the solid stone. The girth and nudity of their lower trunks forbade a direct climb to their limbs.

Against one of the most promising, however, leaned a smaller tree partly uprooted by some bygone whirlwind, yet still stubbornly living, and well branched. After thoughtfully scanning the angle of this cripple and the upper reaches of the sturdy veteran, he slid the hatchet-handle under his belt and commenced a careful climb of the leaning trunk.

At first he must needs frog his way upward by gripping with hands and knees. Then he reached branches forming an irregular but strong ladder, which he ascended with greater ease, though with little more speed, since some of them projected at obstructive angles which necessitated working around them. Yet it was not long before he arrived at the juncture of the slanting tree with a broad limb of the straight one. Drawing himself up on this, he sat against the trunk to rest a minute and grow cooler.

He was about to resume progress when he heard hurried footsteps. Down below appeared Dussault, pounding along at a run, glancing anxiously ahead and upward, but failing to discern the still figure in the notch above.

"What's the matter, Rafe?" called the man on the limb.

Dussault stopped short, seeking the speaker, his upturned face retaining such worriment that the beholder's eyes narrowed. The perturbed look vanished, however, in a relieved grin.

"Nothing," panted the runner. "I—huh—got lonesome."

"Oh," dryly. "Snakes both skinned?"

"No—I left—huh—the big one flat. I was—huh—afraid you'd fall—or something."

"Oh," repeated Marden, more cordially. "No, not yet. By the way, how's your head for high places?"

"Good. I used to walk—huh—high wire in a circus years ago."

"No!"

"Yes. A long time back, when I was lighter—just a kid. The girls and the whisky ended that—made me unsteady—but my balance is still good—when I'm sober. Can you see that shelf yet?"

"Not yet. But I'm on my way. Come on when you get your wind. Or wait there till I see what's what. If you do come up, this tree here is the ladder."

Marden nodded toward the inclined trunk, then recommenced his climb. As if to make amends for its inhospitable bareness below, the big tree now offered convenient limbs or stubs affording uninterrupted ascent. From one to another of these he worked with cool deliberation, while Dussault stood watching and recovering breath.

Up and up and up clambered the lean man, lifting himself by powerful arms rather than by long legs, and progressing with a steady ease which his partner noted with envy. At length he paused; surveyed the black wall a few seconds; then yelled exultantly:

"Come on, Rafe! There is a shelf—and a big branch leading right to it!"

Clearly marked on the wall now was a ledge, curve-edged and somewhat tilted, but wide enough to walk easily upon if the walker possessed calm nerves. Its length was indeterminable, for only a few yards of it were visible through the thick-leaved boughs; but that section angled at a gentle upward grade as if leading to the top.

"Ha! Good! I'm coming!" rose Dussault's voice. Then, after a second, "Wait for me."

Marden's eyes contracted again. Why did the slow starter make that demand? He frowned downward, seeing only intervening verdure; scowled at the shelf, and coldly proceeded. This man Dussault required too much waiting on.

The bough leading to the ledge was broad and firm. Another, a few feet higher and nearly parallel, offered a steadying hand-rail. Feeling somewhat squeamish at this lofty height, but concentrating his mind on the footing, he passed slowly toward the stone.

The gap between castle wall and tree trunk was perhaps twenty feet; but it seemed ten times the distance before he made the passage; and the final straddle from the natural bridge to the rock felt as if it were miles wide. Once arrived, however, he turned at once to the continuation of his journey. The shelf was long, he rejoiced to find, and held its ascending grade.

"Hey, Jule! Are you waiting?" called Dussault, climbing fast now, despite his bulk. He was still invisible, but small noises proved him not far below.

"No. I'm tired of waiting. You won't get lost," sarcastically returned Marden. And he kept on—but slowly. When Dussault reached the bridge-bough and demanded his whereabouts he answered without turning his head. And when the former high-wire man crossed the gap—which he did with remarkable nimbleness—he discerned the pathfinder still on the ledge, plodding along with a stiffness of knee and rigidity of neck plainly revealing resentment. A man's back may sometimes be more eloquent than his face; and that of the tall man now told the shorter that if he felt any distrust he could not only catch up but go ahead, and be —— to him.

Dussault followed rapidly, but made no effort to assume the lead. Instead he suddenly radiated good nature.

"Great work, Jule!" he congratulated. "It takes you to figure out the way! Now the stones are ours! Push along, partner, and let's be up and at 'em!"

Marden paused to look around at his joyous face, and his rankling anger crumbled. Dussault's grin was wide and wholesome, his tone comradely, his eyes affectionate. The brown eyes warmed in response. Then the pair went on with increased speed.

A few yards farther along, the wall beside them ceased to act as barrier. A gap opened, a section, eroded from the perpendicular to a tilted trough, ribbed with hard transverse strata, presenting a surface as rough as that of a washboard, up which bare or rubber-soled feet could walk with ease. Into this the disheveled climbers turned, to proceed now with long, swift strides to the summit. And there, at last upon the crest of the Castillo del Diablo, they halted to look around at a weird collection of petrified demons.

The tall towers which had been so noticeable from afar were by no means the only freaks of erosion which topped the great black pedestal. Smaller spires were there, and juts and humps and bumps, standing or leaning or lying, resembling lifted heads of snake or dragon, upsitting toads, armless octopi, and kindred monstrosities; and there were stone mushrooms and malformed hourglasses, knife-edged ridges, spear-heads, all forming a chaotic assembly of menacing hostilities.

Viewing them the discoverer could readily fancy that this had been the workshop of a demon who, laboring to fashion some infernal creature into which to breathe a cruel spirit, had cast aside numberless half-formed bodies before evolving one sufficiently hideous. To

the men who now surveyed those shapes, however, came only the thought that among them it would be no simple task to locate their loot.

"Things are seldom what they seem," quoth Marden. "I had an idea that this castle roof would be flat and open when once we got at it. And now look at it!"

"So had I," admitted Dussault, scowling at the rough expanse. "But it's bare, anyway; no cactus to claw us. Well, let's start hunting."

They moved forward. Then Marden suggested:

"We must be near the front of the place now. Let's walk out to the end and then work back. Then we'll know where we started, and that we haven't missed anything—if there's anything here."

His tone was matter-of-fact, but his eyes gleamed as they ranged along the roof. He was more than willing to believe that the treasure was here. Dussault frowned at the note of doubt, and his answer was grumpy.

"It's here! And don't worry, we won't miss it. Leave it to me!"

"That's what I'm doing," countered Marden, an unpremeditated edge to his tone.

Dussault shot a swift look at him, a deeper scowl darkening his face. Then the look of ire turned to one of injury.

"Look here, Jule," he said, in a hurt way, "don't get me wrong. Maybe I've been acting like a baby, but I can't help it. My feelings run away with me. And if you're wondering why I was so anxious to have you wait, it's this: I get lonesome as the very devil unless you're close to me. There's something about this place that gives me a shiver down my back every now and then. I know I'm a fool, but—"

"Why, forget it, old scout!" Marden interrupted, heartily. "I'm a fool myself. I'm getting touchy from the sun, I guess. Come on, let's go."

And, once more partners, they went.

## X

THREE hours after the treasure-hunters first set foot among the monsters tenanting the top of the Castle of the Devil, they stood silent and somber at the end overlooking the gulf. Marden's long face looked longer, Dussault's heavy visage heavier, than ever before; both weighted with a burden of gloom. The brown eyes moved slowly, searchingly, but hopelessly over the array of abortive sorceries. The amber ones held a dazed expression, and in the depths of their sun-contracted pupils blended bitter disappointment and sullen anger. The rough roof had been traversed from end to end and from side to side, and had yielded—nothing.

Nothing but fantastic relics of countless centuries of wear by water and dust, a heat which became literally hellish as the morning wind died into the breathless calm of afternoon, and a grewsome pit yawning in the midst of the place. Nothing else, save fatigue, came to the persistent pair, for all their endeavor. Now, as they eyed the barren waste wherein hope had waned, all its grisly deformities seemed to leer back at them in mockery. From far above, where a pair of high-flying macaws winged their early way homeward, fell raucous cries like jeers of ridicule. Dussault looked up at the screaming mates with teeth bared in a silent snarl. Marden did not look, but twitched his head abruptly as if to rid his ears of the noise.

Stones, stones, stones! Stones they had come to find, and stones they had found in abundance—but all worthless. Great stones, smaller stones, tall stones, squat stones, firm stones, loose stones. Not all the malformations were fixed to the parent rock; some, eroded to thin stems at their bases, had broken and toppled, to knock off fragments on impact and thereafter lie at haphazard angles. Among these scattered fragments none was very small. The chips and crumbs might have been expected were not there. For no apparent reason,

this trivial fact now obtruded among Marden's thoughts as he surveyed the mélange.

Presently his gaze focused on the surface close to his feet, then ranged toward the central portion where, invisible but still remembered, opened that big dark hole. Despite the sight-confusing irregularities, he became convinced that the middle of the castle was lower than its sides, the whole top forming a basin, with the hole at the lowest point. That cavity, as they had learned by peering and dropping a stone or two, fell to far depths, with water at bottom, and was undoubtedly the same shaft which they had previously discovered at the end of the tunnel from the *caño*.

"Well, Rafe," he broke the glum silence, "providing the big bag of gems and gold ever was banked up here in this devil's treasury, I can think of one place where it may all be deposited now. But if it's there we'll never get it."

"Where?" demanded Dussault.

"At the bottom of that shaft—if it has a bottom."

"How do you figure that?"

"Well, something like this. This roof slopes inward more or less, more in some places, less in others. And there's not a really small piece of rock anywhere up here, though there ought to be. Where did the little ones go? Down that chute. And how? Washed down by rain. According to what folks say, it rains torrents here at a certain season every year. This top catches a young flood every now and then, and said flood pushes all the small stuff toward the lowest part, there in the middle, and finally down the shaft. Only the chunks, that are too big for the water to move, stay put.

"Well, now, if that bag of swag ever was deposited up here, the bag itself rotted apart a good many years ago. Probably it was made of leather, or maybe only of untanned hides. No matter what it was, the rain and the dew would rot it and the sun would crack it and before long it would go to pieces.

"Then the nuggets and the stones would lie loose, and the rain would beat them along down whatever slope they happened to be on, and the little currents would roll them along farther, and finally, one by one, they'd reach that sink-hole and drop in.

"It would be a gradual process, of course, but when you figure that there have been at least three hundred years for the rains to work in, and nobody knows how many deluges each year to do the work, why, the thing's simple enough. So there you are."

Dussault listened with a fixed scowl, his self-indulgent lips drawn into a rebellious pout. But he found no argument to advance in refutation. After a minute Marden went on, in the same judicial tone:

"But it looks to me, and has looked right along, as if no treasure ever would be cached up here. Put yourself in old Last Survivor's place. He must have been about all shot when he pulled out of here, if he'd starved to the point where he would eat his pals. Such being the case, would he be likely to make this hard climb when he could hide the stuff a good deal easier somewhere down below? It doesn't look likely to me."

"He had strength enough and willpower enough to go clear to the coast," combated Dussault, "and to carry a sizable weight of gold with him. If he could do that he could climb this rock first."

"Well, yes, he was a tough old bird, no question of that," conceded the other. "But then again, how would he get up here? We've been lucky enough to find a route by a leaning tree and a branch but those trees weren't in that position in his day. Probably they didn't even exist; and if they did they were a lot smaller—"

"There must have been others, though, standing in about the same general place."

"Yes, that's true too. But still—Well, there's not much use in arguing those points. What matters to us is that we've found no loot, and the only places

where we haven't looked are up on the tops of those towers—which neither we nor old What's-his-name could ever climb, and which would be a perfectly asinine thing to do anyway—or down in the bottom of that hole, which is worse yet. So we might as well go back to camp and get a drink of water. We can find that, anyway; and I'm perishing for it."

"So am I," admitted Dussault. "But first let's look down that hole again."

"All right."

Soberly they made their way back through the chaotic rubble, pausing now and then for futile inspection of some shadowed recess. At length they stood again beside the pit, to peer down into its vacancy, as uselessly as before. Jagged walls, harshly hostile, drably gray, streaked with black drip, fell into empty darkness; darkness nearer to the rim than it had been, for the sun now had sunk well down, no longer casting its light from a high angle. Once more Dussault lifted a sizable loose stone from the near-by surface and heaved it in, and once more both listened. The rock clattered a few times against projections as it fell; then dropped silently; and at length sent up a hollow, heavy plunging noise.

"And that's the end of that, and of everything else that falls in here," said Marden. "It's no use, Rafe. Unless we can dope out some other likely gloryhole and find our plunder in it, we'd better go out to the river and hunt turtle-eggs for a living."

"Huh?" ejaculated Dussault, startled. "We're not so near broke as that, are we?"

"Well, not quite. But we're pretty close to hardpan. All the same, I don't mean that we have to get out right away. We'll do some more looking around first."

"I'll say we will!" The throaty voice thickened with wrathful determination, and the scowl, momentarily surprized away, deepend again.

"That stuff is here—somewhere—and I'm here to get it! And unless you can show me a better place I'm going to look again, all over this rock. I'm going to turn over every stone and crawl on my belly to look into every nook and corner we might have missed today. We've used a coarse comb up here, now I'll use a fine one! —— it, Jule, that treasure is here, it's got to be here, and I feel in my bones that it is here!"

Marden eyed him cornerwise, then shrugged a shoulder and turned toward the way of exit.

"All right," he assented. "I'm with you on most of that. My bones don't prognosticate anything, but the fine-tooth comb idea is worth trying, if only to convince ourselves. But right now I have to get a drink or turn into a mummy. I'm so dry my skin's cracking."

He walked away. Dussault stood several minutes longer beside the hole, vainly peering down it; then, reluctantly followed.

They descended as they had come; Marden first, moving cautiously; Dussault with less care. Once more on the ground, the former glanced sardonically at the heavy rope lying useless, and stepped over to shoulder it once more. But then his brow creased with new thought, his puckered eyes ran up the wall, and, after a brief hesitation, he let the coil lie and walked away. Dussault, sliding down in his turn, disregarded the cable entirely. He had forgotten its existence.

Once more, on emerging from the trees, Marden took a direct line toward the camp. Once more he came to the irregular mound which had halted him before, and once more he paused beside it. Then, forgetting his thirst, he moved slowly all around it, while his follower, arriving, regarded him questionly. Completing the circuit, he spoke out quickly.

"Rafe, here's one place that's worth looking into! It looked unnatural before, and now it's more so. Walk around it, and you'll see that it has four short arms, like an X, or a chopped-off cross; and even if this is a place of freaks, this one isn't right. A cross, beside the Devil's Castle? It doesn't belong. Let's see what we can see."

The yellow eyes widened, the black-bearded face brightened, as Dussault circled the queer mound. Marden drew from his belt the hitherto unused hatchet, chopped away some tough brush, knocked the stubs aside and, reversing the blade, hammered loose a stretch of hard soil, revealing stone. Both men scraped off the earth with their hands, to find beneath it not one long stone, but a number of short ones, laid in order, with semi-solidified earth between.

"A cairn!" asserted Marden.

And a cairn it patently was, built long ago, smoothed over since by fine-grained soil borne by rain and wind, compacted by dry-season suns into a mass resistant as solid rock to a kicking foot.

Against the impact of bludgeoning steel, however, it could not cohere. And now, before the renewed attack of the hatchet and the scraping and shoving of Dussault's eager hands, the portion under assault grudgingly succumbed and separated into its original parts. A stone came away, then another and still another, along with fistfuls of earth and gravel. Deeper grew the sectional excavation. Then the work stopped short.

Dussault's grubbing fingers clutched and pulled out a bone; a curved, crumbly, yellowed relic which was so desiccated that it snapped apart between his palms, but which was unmistakably a human rib. And in the dirt at either side of his finger-grooves showed others, partly bared, awaiting another scrape to reveal themselves more clearly. But that scrape was never made.

For a few seconds Dussault squatted as if petrified, eyes bulging. The color faded from his face, leaving it ghastly. All at once he threw down the fragments, sprang up and back as if avoiding something poisonous, and choked:

"No! No! Not I! *Dios!*"

He took several backward steps, muttering incoherently, while Marden stared. Then, recovering himself with visible effort, he rasped:

"Cover it up, Jule—and get away from it! It's accursed! Cover it up! There's no treasure there. Hurry, man! Let's get out of here, for God's sake!"

Marden gave the bones a slow look, his partner another, the exhumed stones a third. Saying nothing, he put back a stone or two, footed some earth negligently about them, and started away toward camp.

"No, I guess there's nothing there that we'd want," he drawled. "But where does the curse come in? That's one of the old die-hards buried there, undoubtedly—more than one, maybe—but we never did him any harm, so—"

"Don't talk about the —— thing!"

The husky voice quivered. The tall Northerner's brows lifted quizzically, and his eyes slid to the yellow-white countenance. Dussault did not meet his glance; he marched mechanically on, staring in front of him. Marden said no more.

As they neared the camp their nostrils encountered a smell, more rank at every onward stride. When they reached the tent Marden's nose was lifted and his lips down-drawn in repugnance. The young anaconda, odorous when killed, was now, after lying hours in the afternoon heat, making its presence unavoidably known. Decomposition had not yet made much progress, but every gland was exuding a stench of snakiness fully as offensive, while the drying hide of the *dalle* added its own flavor to the breathless atmosphere.

Marden endured it a minute or two, while gathering up a tin cup, a towel, and soap inside the tent. Then he stepped out, with mouth set and eyes determined, to serve an ultimatum. But the purposed demand died unborn, for Dussault was already acting—unexpectedly and surprizingly.

With an expression even more eloquent of repulsion than that of his partner, he was dragging the serpent to the creek. At the edge he heaved the carcass into the current. Returning, he yanked from the bough the dangling skin of the cave-snake, recently the object of such zealous regard; walked back to

the water, and threw it after the boa. Then he stood watching his erstwhile prizes go floating sluggishly down the stream.

"Thanks," said Marden.

If his incomprehensible partner heard he gave no sign of it. With a faint smile, the lean man trudged away, heading upstream, seeking a spot where he could drink and bathe in uncontaminated water. A few rods up he found a large low stone, and there he refreshed himself, drinking deep, then laving in adjacent shallows. Presently Dussault joined him. Except for a few monosyllables, however, no words were exchanged.

Once more returning to their temporary abode, they made a supper and ate it, still taciturn. Marden awaited some explanation of the other's odd actions, but none came. Instead, when the meal was done and tobacco burning, Dussault announced another strange decision.

"Jule, I'm going to spend the night up on the Castillo. Come on up with me."

"Why? What's the idea?"

"Well, then we'll be all ready to start work in the morning. And I want to sleep in fresh air. This place stinks, and with our tent shut it'll be terrible; and we can't leave the flap open."

"Nothing bothered us last night."

"No, but something may tonight. That *tigre*—I'm afraid he's located us by this time."

"A *tigre* can climb a tree, can't he, as well as we can?"

"He can, but he's not likely to trail us up there. I'd feel a lot safer up there, Jule—and we'll both sleep better. Come on. I'll carry all the stuff. All we need is the ponchos and a can or two and coffee in the thermos bottle. I'll do all the work. All you have to do is to climb. We can make it before dark. Come on, won't you?"

Marden eyed the grisly castle, doubly black against the last glare of sunset. His tired body rebelled against further endeavor. But his nose recoiled from the smell still pervading the place, and his mind from the close confinement of a shut tent.

"I'm a little nervous tonight," added Dussault, pleadingly. "And that —— cat that tried to dig in at us over there—Honestly, I'm afraid of him, Jule."

"Oh, all right," acquiesced Julian, rising with an effort. "Make the coffee and I'll get the other stuff."

His voice was casual, his expression placid, as he reentered the tent. But as he bent over the grub-box his hands reached mechanically, choosing the food at random, while his brain groped in another direction.

Rafe was afraid, that was plain; he admitted it. But of what? Not of the night-prowling cat, Marden felt; at least, no more than any normal man would be, no more than he had been last night, if as much. Then of what? Of the man-devouring Thing, which had hitherto failed to strike, or even to threaten? That seemed hardly probable, either. Of the bones which had so shocked him recently? There could be no danger from them. Well, then what?

After a moment of mental wrestling, the thinker cast aside the problem. It was just a case of nerves, he decided, engendered by a combination of too much sun, too much work, too much excitement.

The surmise was correct, so far as it went. But it did not go quite far enough.

## XI

THE MOON, sliding up over the edge of the wilderness at its predestined time—a little later each night, now that it was gradually waning—found the number of motionless shapes on the Castillo del Diablo increased by two.

One of these newcomers lay in a gently curving hollow among the black rocks; a broad-bodied, black-headed figure, distinct upon the light inner surface of an outspread poncho which could, at will, be folded over to present to falling dew a protective shield of dark rubber. Now that sheet lay wide, while the man upon it

grew cool in the revived breeze of night. For all the move he made, he might have been asleep, or even dead. But his eyes were open, looking broodingly up at the stars, except when they dropped for a time to the form of his equally silent companion.

That companion, though near, was not lying on his own waterproof. With back against a stone pillar, long legs drawn up, and tumbled hair uncovered to wind and moon, he lolled at the eastern brink, given over to the enjoyment of pure air, playful breeze, silvery light and random thought. Now that he was here, he was glad that he had come; for here was freedom from canvas walls and mysterious near noises, as well as wider vistas for vision and fancy. The wall-flanking trees which had served as avenue of ascent for these two, and possibly might afford the same assistance to other creatures, lay well to the rear of this impromptu bivouac, and the outward view was unhampered.

Down below showed the hillside, open to the light; the creek-edge trees in dusky mass, and the portion of the *caño* near the camp; beyond, the maze of abrupt hills and unknown forest; farther still, the low black mountain ridge, the protuberant Tetas and the short section of the glinting Orinoco. To none of these, however, did the lounger give more than perfunctory regard. They were but the background of a stage whereon imagination reconstructed a drama of greed and vengefulness and strife and tragedy.

Upon the vacant water of the *caño* down yonder appeared a ghostly dugout canoe, shaped in the same unchanging form adopted by the aborigines thousands of years ago, and still followed in the lines of the warped curial of Ramón, which now lay alongside the camp. But this was no mere two-man craft; it was long, deep, capable of carrying a score of men, and jammed with wild figures; figures naked to the waists, swarthy-visaged, shaggy-bearded and long-haired, crowned by piratical kerchiefs.

Wolfish faces lifted to the demoniac stone; some stamped with superstitious perturbation; more with reckless defiance of the devil and all his works. A godless, ruthless crew this, for the most part, and fearless of virtually everything —except something left behind them. Even as they stared at the stone, some of the heads turned to look warily back, and voices muttered uneasily.

The ponderous vessel swung to shore. The men debarked, tied up, lifted food and arms from the hollow shell, kindled a fire, cooked, ate ravenously. Some jested, some laughed, some growled, some swore. All repeatedly eyed the weird crag. One, loud-voiced, named it—

*"Es el Castillo del Diablo!"*

Whereat some guffawed, while others crossed themselves.

A few marched up the hill, divided, sought along the sides of the block for a way to the top. The rest overhauled stained leather garments, rusty breastplates, heavy muskets, battered swords and pikes. And each man entering the canoe was watched narrowly by the rest lest he slyly slip hand into a long, stout bag, amidships.

The baffled searchers returned. Arguments ensued. Then all reembarked. Paddles sank, and the phantom dugout surged on upstream, seeking a less conspicuous camp-site. Around the hill, and through the swamp, and on into unknown shadows it passed, to vanish. But here and there on a tall cliff remained a man to watch and, at need, signal back to others at similar vantages.

Time passed with dream-speed, and up the stream came other canoes burdened with men of the same hawk-eyed, hard-mouthed breed, hunting those gone before. But from cliff to cliff ahead flitted the signal, and then the signalers faded into the woods and were not. And the hunted canoe and its score of men and its bulky bag also were not.

And after an interval the flotilla of pursuers came down again, some of its men glassy-eyed from fever, and passed out into the open reaches and breezy air of

the Orinoco. But, once outside, it split, to garrison the master stream above and below this suspected creek and keep inexorable watch. Presently it was reinforced by other canoe-loads which had driven down-river for days, to become convinced that the deserters had turned aside, and so to return to the main body. And there, with vindictive patience, the whole force waited.

Then back into the ken of the Castillo del Diablo came the long dugout, sliding silently down, its crew now wordless and watchful. That crew was not so large as before; several men were gone, stricken down by day-crawling snake or night-creeping fever. The survivors no longer laughed, nor even smiled. Slit-eyed, grim-jawed, they kept constant guard.

Moreover, they no longer went half naked. Now their bodies were fully clothed with the tough leather and the light but strong armor, and weapons lay in order, ready to hand, not carelessly intermingled as at first. The sack still rode amidships. But in the long shell was no food.

With a scowl at the malign castle, they passed and were gone. Then, with the magic velocity of imagination, they were back again, not so silent. Oaths rumbled from them as they cursed their luck, with sidelong snarls at one another as evil tempers clashed. They knew now of the blockade.

They made camp anew, posted observers on a high point or two, scattered to hunt for meat and a way out of the cul-de-sac wherein they had trapped themselves. Of the first they found little; of the second none at all.

Animals were too wily, birds too few or high, to fall easy victims to the clumsy smoothbores. Precipices hemmed them in, blocked every effort to discover a route around their beleaguering enemies, wore out their remaining strength. Some sickened, lay untended, died miserably. Others, maddened by heat, hunger, and real or fancied insults, locked in death-grapples.

Some fought fair, dueling in a ring of their red-eyed mates, knives thrusting until blood or bowels gushed from severed arteries or ripped abdomens, and, perhaps, the victor toppled dying on the vanquished dead.

Some fought foul, striking without warning. One or two became murderous maniacs, killing and being killed like mad dogs. And a few, fleeing from actual or imagined expeditionary detachments of the blockaders, plunged off unseen ledges to fatal injury. The dreamer sitting up on the roof in the moonlight saw all these ends.

The score dwindled to a scant squad, the hardiest of all; gaunt, hollow-eyed men who spoke little, slept lightly, and watched one another—and the bag. Each, as needs must, hunted his own food, ate all of it when captured, brought back nothing to the others. Then one, while stalking through the woods, found himself at the back of one of his mates, crouching beside an animal path. He paused, watched, while madness grew in his eyes; then crept forward. A sudden pounce—a knife flash—the path-watcher fell on his face, kicked weakly, lay still. And the killer, with a throaty chuckle, used the knife again, more deliberately now, carving instead of stabbing. Then he gathered smokeless dry wood and made a fire—

The dreamer shuddered and changed his position; looked about him at unchanged actualities; then lapsed again into the ghost land.

There was but one ghost now. It was that of the madman who had built that fire. All the others had vanished forever; vanished, by such stratagems as his insane cunning suggested to him, that their waning strength might restore his own. Gone, all gone without a trace— But no. There was a trace; a strange cairn on the hillside, wherein lay the bones of, perhaps, four men, laid head to head in the form of a square cross; a cairn conceived by an unbalanced brain, either in unholy mockery or in some perverted instinct to evade eternal punishment by constructing a semblance of the sacred symbol.

Now the lone survivor walked down the hill, bearing on one broad shoulder a bag of staggering weight—but not the bag which had first come in here. This was smaller. That other was gone with the murdered men—where? None knew but the departing schemer. But, as he sat alone in the big canoe and pushed out to drift to the river, he grinned up at the Castillo del Diablo.

Despite the distance, he was plainly visible, and oddly familiar. He was heavily built, strong-bodied, full-fleshed notwithstanding his hardships; black-headed, black-bearded, black-furred on exposed chest and brawny arms; yellow-toothed as he grinned. And yellow-eyed. He was—

Marden started, shocked. That man was—

His brain rebelled at the thought, violently refused it admittance, knocked it away. Dreaming was all right up to a certain point, but when it made a man imagine his partner a maniac and worse it would have to stop right there! Decisively he straightened his legs, threw back his shoulders, and sat bolt upright, scowling out at the empty night. Then he turned his head, to find Dussault's moody eyes fixed full upon him.

"Hullo!" Marden exclaimed jerkily. "Thought you'd gone to sleep, Rafe."

"Not yet." Dussault answered with an effort, as if recalling his thoughts from some far bourn. "I was afraid you might doze away and fall off."

Shame flooded Marden's soul; shame as great as if his partner had known what picture had taken shape in his imagination. As he rose and moved bedward, he mentally kicked himself hard.

"I guess I'd better loaf in a more sensible place, at that," he admitted. "It would be easy to drop off, in more ways than one."

He stretched out on his poncho. Dussault's gaze still dwelt on him, solemn, almost melancholy. After a brief look at the grave face beside him Marden launched cheerful conversation, partly to make amends for his previous unsociability, partly to banish firmly and finally from his own mind the wraiths of a long-dead past.

"This was a great idea of yours, partner," he declared. "The bed's a trifle hard, but the air's perfect. And tomorrow we'll have another go at our hide-and-seek stones, and I bet we'll turn 'em up. And say, what d'you suppose they are? Diamonds or emeralds, you said once, but this isn't diamond country, is it?"

"No." The response came more readily this time. "Not this region along the Orinoco. There are no precious stones of any kind in this river ground. But a few hundred miles east, in the British Guiana border section, they find diamonds; and about the same distance west, in Colombia, they dig up emeralds. The chances are that these stones are emeralds, because there's a big river from Colombia—the Meta—flowing into the Orinoco not very far above here, and it would be natural enough for that old band to come down that river with their treasure and then down the Orinoco, working east to Trinidad, which was a Spanish island in those days.

"To come over here from the east with diamonds, on the other hand, would be a very hard journey, and senseless besides; the rivers all run the wrong way, and the travelers would be heading away from civilization instead of toward it, which would be perfectly idiotic when they had wealth to cash in. I hope they are emeralds—even though that's my unlucky stone. The South American diamonds are usually off color and worth a good deal less than the African blue-whites."

"That so? Well, we'll make 'em emeralds, then. But what was that you said about their being unlucky?"

"They're unlucky for me. I've had several of them—small, but high grade—and I lost every one, and got hurt besides. Every time I've had a bad accident I had an emerald on me."

"Hm! That's queer."

"Yes, it is. But let me get my hands

on a bag full of them and I'll take another chance."

"You bet!" Marden grinned. "But say, why would old Whoozis— By the way, what was his name?"

A brief silence. Then, shortly—

"I don't know."

"Well, no matter. Anyway, why would he pack out the gold instead of the stones? The stones would be worth more."

"In the right place, yes. But gold would be negotiable anywhere; stones only at the Spanish market. And he probably didn't know their value. Maybe the value wasn't as great then as now, either."

"Uh-huh."

Marden lay quiet a few minutes, idly thinking. Then he yawned, turned over, and drew his poncho loosely over him.

"Well, let's snooze awhile," he proposed. "Good night, all you big and little black devils. And the same to you, old cannibal."

Why that jocose epithet slipped from his tongue he could not have told. It was unpremeditated, almost unrealized by his sleepy mind; a mere casual bit of banter. But its effect was startling.

For an instant Dussault lay rigid. Then, swift as a striking snake, he was up on his knees, hand at belt, teeth bared in a snarl, slitted eyes stabbing, face contorted with menace.

"Wha'd'you mean by that?" he rasped, his voice raucous with concentrated fury.

"Huh?"

Marden lay staring. Suddenly, as he plumbed those hateful eyes, a cold shock passed over him, succeeded by an instinct to spring up and grapple in defensive attack. But he held himself inert.

"Why, not a danged thing, Rafe," he heard his own voice drawling. "What's the matter with you?"

For a few long seconds the thick shape continued to loom over him with fixed glare. Then it slowly sank back.

"Don't — call — me — any — more— names," grated Dussault, a distinct pause between words, as if he forced down some fierce impulse struggling within him.

"All right. Sorry."

Thereafter both lay wordless, looking straight up, unseeing, at the down-peering stars. And, despite the warmth of the stone and the shelter of the poncho, the long man felt recurrent chills; not of actual cold; nor of fear, but of unforgotten shock, tinged with awe. That waking dream of his, enacting itself while his partner's gaze was on him, had been perhaps a telepathic transference of thought, and based on fact.

Now, since reading those furious eyes a moment since, he knew—knew as well as if his mate had shouted it—that, notwithstanding centuries of time and infusions of French and Italian strains, the blood and perhaps the brain of Dussault was tainted by a ghastly heritage from the Spaniard who here had eaten the flesh of his fellows.

## XII

SLEEP came somewhat tardily to Marden that night, but it came. His was not a worrisome temperament; and his mind, though at times given to fancies, was for the most part coolly practical. Where another man might have lain torturing himself with false alarms, he considered facts and regained equanimity.

"What of it?" was his conclusion. "Rafe's all right; a bit temperamental, that's all, and over-sensitive to the rattle of the bones in his family closet. We all have skeletons somewhere in our ancestral history, I guess. For all I know, my own escutcheon may have the shadow of a gallows or two, and maybe of a madhouse, somewhere on it. But none of us is responsible for what our forefathers did. Come, now, forget it!"

With that he resolutely shut his eyes and relaxed, to drift presently out on a misty sea of slumber whereon no affrighting apparition raised its head. When he lifted his lids again the sky was bright with morning.

Sitting up, he found all serene. Dussault still slept, head partly buried under

his poncho, one hairy hand and forearm lying loosely on the bare stone. For a moment Marden regarded him thoughtfully; then, with a slight shrug, arose, walked to the verge where he had sat in the moonlight, and cast a slow glance out and down.

On the hill and the creek showed nothing new. Among the waterside trees a corner of the tent was partly visible. Obviously the shelter was unharmed. From the woods, near and far, floated only the squawks of birds. All indications betokened that, so far as danger was concerned, the move to the Castillo had been a needless precaution.

His gaze veered to the Tetas, to find them blank. If the spy over yonder still made his daily trips to the top he had not yet taken up his work. Marden grinned derisively as he realized what scant results rewarded that observer's surveillance: only an occasional glimpse of the Americans when they appeared at some high point. The tent and its vicinity were below the level of his vision, as was also the *caño*.

Even when the treasure-hunters were up on the castle roof he could not descry them, unless they stood at an outer edge of the stone, for the towers and other projections would block his view. The only practical effect of his espionage, therefore, would be the knowledge that the intruders had neither departed nor died. If that knowledge was worth anything to him he was welcome to it.

Turning back, Marden stepped to the waiting food, drank some hot black coffee from the metal bottle, and fell to opening a tin. The hard rattle and scrape of the can-opener aroused Dussault, who started up suddenly, looked swiftly about him, then relaxed from startled tension.

"Morning," greeted Marden, calmly. "Come and get it."

"Morning." Dussault yawned, scratched his bristly jaw, arose rather stiffly, tucked in shirt and buckled belt, avoiding his partner's clear gaze, meanwhile. His eyes, heavy-lidded and dark-pouched, betrayed a rather poor rest.

"Another notch gone, or I'm seeing crooked," observed the breakfaster, eying the indrawn belt.

At that Dussault smiled, gave his trousers a hitch, and looked him in the face.

"I could make it two by pulling it tight," he announced.

"Good! I'll make a tango-dancer of you yet."

The heavy man chuckled in his old familiar way and stepped forward, his momentary constraint relieved. During the meal, however, he said almost nothing, and several times he covertly studied the placid Marden, who gave not the slightest indication of remembering the ebullition of the bygone night. Instead, he completed his preparation for work by lighting a cigaret, laying another beside Dussault, and casually inquiring—

"What's your idea, if any, regarding the program for the day?"

Dussault ignited his own smoke, looked along the zigzag roof, and considered.

"We'd better reverse the course we took yesterday," he decided. "Start at the rear end and work toward the front, weaving from side to side and looking into every possible cranny, and over the sides, too, to make sure there is no shelf or hole that we've missed. Take a good look into the big hole in the middle at noon, when the sun strikes straight down. After that we'll have to go to camp to eat. If we've found nothing by that time— But we'll consider that when we come to it."

"All right. That sounds sensible to me. And we may as well be getting at it. That sun's hot already, and due to be hotter."

"No question of that."

They reached for helmets and donned them, for the sun, hitherto tempered by low clouds, now had emerged to hurl its full force on their heads. Then they arose, to stand a minute finishing their smokes. Marden quizzically surveyed his unkempt bedfellow, passed a hand over his own rough face, and chuckled:

"We're a couple of hot sketches, Rafe. What would the girls up home say if they could see us now?"

" 'What beastly bums!' " grinned Dussault. "But when we get back there with our pockets full they'll fight to get at these same bums."

"Likely. And you'll put on the high hat and spurn 'em all—just as I will."

"Exactly. Just as you will."

They laughed together, flipped away the strong butts, and began walking toward the gulf. With that laugh vanished whatever awkwardness had lingered in Dussault's consciousness. Whether or not his partner had read his dark secret last night—and there was no proof that he had—it manifestly made no difference this morning.

AT THE extreme end they set themselves to the prosecution of a deliberate and all-inclusive search. There was good sense in Dussault's plan to begin work at this end; for on reaching this section yesterday they had been tired, dispirited, and dull-eyed from heat, and thus might have overlooked some pocket in the stone, some recess capable of retaining a treasure hoard despite all sluicings by flood-rain. Another factor which might bring success this morning was the different slant of the sun's rays, lighting up spots which yesterday had lain in shadow.

Side by side they worked, methodically traversing the harsh surface from eastern to western brink and back again, gradually progressing northward; stopping to peer closely into every depression and, if it held rock-débris, to dig it out and make sure that only solid stone lay beneath; examining with particular care the spaces beneath toppled erosions which now lay at various angles against low bumps and swells; leaning out to gaze down the stark sides of the block, too, as they reached opposite edges.

Save for brief query and reply concerning some new spot under inspection, no words were exchanged. Each kept his attention unswervingly fast upon the task set. There would be no repetition of this "fine comb" sweep of the summit; it must be made thorough now. So, as the sun steadily slid higher on its appointed course, they moved with equal fixity of purpose on their own.

Such painstaking work was necessarily slow; and, in spite of their early commencement, they found themselves not far to the north of the central shaft when noon drew near. More than half the roof had been covered, however; and each felt that the section beyond, keenly and hopefully inspected yesterday, held little cause for hope today.

Now they were hungry, thirsty, tired and more than a little dejected. They stopped, mopped faces for the twentieth time on sleeves already sweat-soaked, and glumly eyed the unpromising bumps beyond. Then Dussault picked up a loose chunk and scraped a gray scratch on a smooth black undulation, marking the limit of present operations. Thereafter both plodded back toward the shelf of exit, pausing en route at the pit.

Under the vertical rays of the sun they could see farther down into the darksome hole than during their previous survey; but the lengthening of vision brought little addition of knowledge. The same jagged juts and small oblique shelves showed with greater clarity, and a few shadowed recesses spotted the walls with dense black; but farther down, irregular bulges interfered with both light and view and, against the lower gloom, sight failed.

Ugly nakedness above, empty dark below, and total engulfment of anything crossing the brink—these were the sole revelation and promise of that forbidding cavity.

Marden, however, moved around the edge with slow scrutiny, studying the angular walls from all angles. At one spot he paused to peer at a black niche somewhat larger than the others, overshadowed by a slanting shelf a few inches wide. Then he passed along, to lift his head presently, glance at a slender spire a few feet off, and yawn.

"Bare as Mother Hubbard's cupboard," he remarked. "And we poor dogs get no bone here."

Dussault made no rejoinder. After another gloomy look downward he turned away. They journeyed to the gap, the shelf, the tree, and down to the ground. There Marden glanced again at the coil of rope—and again let it lie.

They made their way along the side of the castle until well beyond the trees, thus avoiding the line of descent which would have taken them past the mound wherein they had delved yesterday. That direct route was henceforth tacitly taboo. No word was said until they reached the trees beside the tent.

"Phew!" said Marden then, nose wrinkling. "That swamp snake of yours sure was a stinkerino perfecto, Rafe. We'll have to spade up the ground here, before we'll be rid of his fragrant memory."

A smell, faint but unmistakable, still clung to the spot. Dussault sniffed, but seemed less sensitive to the odor than his companion.

"It isn't bad," he replied. "Let's eat and get back."

His tone was heavy, his face moody. Evidently he was much downcast by the fruitless outcome of the morning's work. Marden, saying no more, pushed aside the loose tent-flap and entered. Then he stopped short.

The interior, left last night in neat order, now was in confusion. The open food-box lay overthrown, its contents scattered about the floor. The rice-bag was upset, its white grains spilled wide. The small trunks, formerly aligned with the tent walls, stood askew. Clothing, towels, dishes, and other loose articles lay on the earth.

Dussault, pushing in behind, halted with a startled grunt as he, too, beheld the disorder. They stood wordless a few seconds, surveying the litter. Then said Dussault, his voice low and hard:

"Come on, Jule. They must be close by—saw us coming and ducked out—didn't have time to plunder the place. We'll get 'em!"

Belligerently he wheeled, gun drawn. Marden followed close, narrow-eyed and ready. Side by side they marched through the tree-belt, veering this way and that, searching for hidden men. They found no men, no signs of men save those previously made by themselves.

Working along the creek-edge, they discerned no trace of any recent landing there. Their own disreptuable canoe lay undisturbed, and no other was anywhere within view. Furthermore, any hasty departure by water within the last few minutes must have been audible, since a dugout could not be suddenly shoved out and swiftly paddled off, in silence.

Once more at the tent, Dussault lost his truculence and stole an uneasy look uphill, toward that sinister mound which yesterday had given him such a shock. Ready enough to fight any number of living rascals, he felt strange qualms as into his mind crept the thought that possibly these visitors had not been living; that they had walked, not just now, but last night, with a purpose far more dire than the mere ransacking of an unguarded tent. Though he pushed that thought from him, he still felt a clammy coolness along his spine. And when Marden spoke he started.

"What d'you suppose did this, Rafe? It was no gang of sneak-thieves from the river. Not one thing is missing. It's got me stumped."

As if in answer, a hideous bellowing noise broke suddenly on the noonday quiet. Both men wheeled, staring. The uproar came from somewhere down the creek, seeming close at hand, yet, paradoxically, at a distance, and hard to place. For some minutes it continued, inhuman, ugly, assailing the ears like shouts of inarticulate anger. Then it ceased. With equal abruptness Dussault burst into loud laugher.

"Monkeys!" he cried, nodding toward the tent. "Howlers! That's what raided us. Ha-ha-ha-ha! Nothing but monks. Two or three howlers could pull this whole place apart—they're big beasts. They just played in here, found nothing they wanted, and went. We're a fine pair of fools—ha-ha-ha!"

His mirth was over-boisterous, betraying previous strain. Jamming his weapon back into its holster, he strode back into the tent, where he began picking up the scattered cans. Marden voiced a short "Humph!" and joined him in the task of righting things. While they worked they alternately swore at the mischief wrought and joked over their recent vengeful hunt for human malefactors.

As they found that no actual damage had been done and visioned the monkey-shines enacted by the presumptive raiders the subject grew increasingly humorous.

Had they taken the time, however, to trail that loud-mouthed simian—and been lucky enough to find him—they might have learned that he was nearly a mile away, on the other side of the *caño*, and alone. And had they then been able to speak his language, or he theirs, they might have been told that he was not even aware of the existence of their camp. But, since the circumstantial evidence was against him, he was summarily convicted and quickly forgotten—as is often the case among both monkeys and men.

## XIII

MIDAFTERNOON found the partners once more at the end of the Castillo—the end facing the river—and virtually at the end of hope. The relentless combing of the entire roof had brought no result.

Wearily they sat on black hummocks, body and brain dulled by heat. A sultry, sweltering heat more oppressive than any which had gone before, a heavy heat which might presage crashing storm, and which caused Marden's lackluster eyes to move once or twice to the still clear horizon. For the time, at least, he cared little whether rain, hail, or sleet and snow descended on the broiling plateau, or whether the whole infernal block vanished in volcanic eruption. As for Dussault, he did not even look for storm-sign, nor for anything else. Now that his stubborn faith was proved conclusively false he had slumped into utter despond.

"Well, Rafe," drawled Marden at length, "we've covered the whole works, practically. The only places where we haven't been are up on those towers and down in the hole. The towers are out of the question, as I've said before. So, to make it complete, I'm going down the hole. Then we're through."

Dussault lifted his drooping head.

"Down the hole? How?"

"Rope. It won't let me down far, but it'll go far enough. There's one place in the wall I want to look into."

"Oh, that black spot four or five yards down? That's no good."

"I don't believe it is, myself. But I'm just fool enough to look."

"You can't see into it now."

"Yes, I can. I brought the pocket flash this afternoon. I've had this job in mind as the last resort."

"Oh. Then that's why you brought up the rope this time, too. I wondered."

"That's why. Let's go."

He arose and wended his way back to the gap of entrance, where the coil of *piassava* lay as he had dropped it. Dussault came sluggishly after him, proceeding to the mouth of the shaft, where he peered downward with no brightening of his gloom. In fact, his scowl deepened and his lips pursed as he gauged the descent to the cheerless recess. The wall afforded virtually no holds for hand or foot on that side; the rope must be not merely an aid, but almost the sole reliance.

"Don't risk it, Jule," he advised, as the tall man came up with the coil. "It's too dangerous. One slip and you're gone."

"I know it," was the cheerful response. "But I'll make it my business not to slip. And climbing the rope used to be my favorite stunt once upon a time. The only hard part will be getting over the edge, and you can give me a hand there."

"And hold the rope too? You're crazy."

"Nope. Wait and see." Marden grinned, enervation banished by the

preliminary thrill of his venture. "The first thing we do is to make fast around this stone spindle, which the original devil of this castle very kindly placed here for this express purpose. Then we straighten out the rope and test it by a tug-of-war with said spindle.

"If neither said spindle nor said rope breaks, we make a loop in the end for my dainty feet to rest in while I'm down below. Then you lower me over the edge, which is smooth enough not to chafe the rope; and when I'm through looking I come up under my own power, all same monkey on a stick. Meanwhile you do nothing but admire the scenery. Now do you get the whole idea?"

Dussault's expression lightened somewhat, but he still objected.

"Yes, and I also get the idea that it's one —— of a long fall to the bottom, and no way out after you strike, and—"

"Thought you used to be a high-wire man!"

"Oh, I did, but this is a different sort of thing."

"Different, yes—and it's my best stunt, just as the wire was yours. Now dry up and help me work."

Dussault dried up, though grudgingly. He no longer believed in the existence of treasure on, or in, this Castillo; indeed, he was at last doubtful of finding it anywhere; and hanging over bottomless blackness on a rope seemed a foolish hazard. However, as he assisted in fastening the cable around the convenient spire he glanced again at the powerful arms and shoulders of his partner and took heart. Certainly Marden possessed the muscle for the work. And he was cool-headed. If the rope was not rotten somewhere—

The rope was not rotten, nor the spire weak, as was proved when both men put their weight to repeated heaves. So the end loop was firmly knotted, the flashlight was tested, and the adventurer stood ready to go. But, as he put foot into the loop, he paused and drew it out again. Then he unbuckled his belt and shed his trousers.

"Now what?" wondered Dussault.

"Bags for the emeralds—if any," smiled Marden. "I can't bring 'em up in my mouth."

With which he tied the long legs of the garment tightly at bottom and rebuckled the belt, this time around his neck. The improvised sacks hung loosely down his back, out of the way, as he let himself down over the edge, Dussault slowly paying out rope. Down he crept, and down, sliding on stomach and chest. Then he swung clear.

Grunting heavily, Dussault let the cable slip gradually through his locked fists, straining backward as counterbalance. Out of his sight, Marden went on downward, foot by foot, warding off the few jagged projections by knee, thigh and elbow. Now that he was dangling over that gruesome blackness and sliding down into it he felt somewhat squeamish for a few seconds; but this feeling departed as soon as the rope stopped motion.

Swaying slightly, he stood in air beside the cavity which he had dared death to examine; an almost horizontal niche, four or five feet long by half as high, now on a level with his shoulders.

Moving with cool care, he drew from his shirt pocket the flat nickel case, switched on the white ray and, bending his knees a little, lowered his head to look in. The light swung slowly from end to end of the recess, then back to the middle, and hung motionless.

The cavity held stones! And gold!

Though he had half hoped, he had hardly expected to find the hoard here. But here it was—or what was left of it. From a line an inch or two inside the lip it rose slantwise, like a dumped heap of dull-green coal shot through with dusty yellow. A few small tattered fragments of something like dirty brown cardboard showed at the lower edge of the pile, telling their own tale. They were the ancient remnants of a skin bag, which long ago had deteriorated and burst, releasing its contents.

The stones and gold nearest the edge

had rolled off by their own weight, carrying the upper portion of the container with them. Others, farther in, had been shaken down in turn by earthquake tremors or other natural quiverings of the Castillo, to fall into the bottomless pit, as the first. But the remainder, wedged by its own settling and protected from inswooping rains by the stone eave just above, could be disgorged only by cataclysm—or by the hand of man.

Still holding the light, his hand moved slowly to rub knuckles along the hard heap and assure him of its indisputable reality. The touch of the unyielding stones banished all disbelief. They were as real as the harsh rock within which they nestled.

"See anything?" dropped Dussault's voice.

He was prone on his stomach now, head over the edge, watching anxiously; but his flat tone betrayed little hope. From his position beside the rope, looking straight down, he was unable to see into the cavity.

The question sent a queer thought flitting through the head of the man below. He, Marden, had only to answer in the negative to make all this treasure his own. Dussault would never seek to verify his denial; he had virtually accepted failure already. Later on, when both had left the country, Marden could return alone and retrieve the whole deposit from its secret vault—if he were that sort of man.

But he was not that sort, and the thought did not tempt him. He merely recognized the possibility, as a man sometimes realizes the ease with which he could slay another, yet feels not the slightest desire to do it. His answer to both the voice of his partner and the whisper of that inner imp was brief and direct. Laying the little lamp within the recess, he palmed a couple of stones and held them out in plain sight.

"I see these—and a lot more," he announced, laughing upward.

Dussault's eyes set in a bulging stare. His lips hung open, emitting no sound. Not until the hand moved back into the wall could he speak. Then he hoarsely muttered—

"*Dios!*"

The exclamation, eloquent of astonishment and awe, floated down to Marden, who laughed again. But he made no answer. His own momentary stupefaction had vanished now, as if transferred to the man above; and, with quick surety of movement, he was working.

Around his neck he drew the twin bags of strong khaki, adjusting them to hang before him; and into them he dropped a capacious handful of mingled emeralds and gold. Thereafter he toiled steadily, coolly, allowing never a stone nor a nugget to escape down the shaft, until the cache was empty of all but fragments of parched hide and small gold grains not worth sweeping up.

The quantity was not so great as first sight had promised. The niche proved deceptively shallow, and its rear wall aslope; so that what had seemed a thick bed of treasure soon gave way to barren rock. Manifestly, the bag originally inserted there had crammed the orifice to capacity, and perhaps bulged out over the lip; and after its decay more than half of its contents must have gone down the shaft. The weight of the remainder was sufficient to put a heavy strain on the neck of the finder and to make him thankful that the supporting belt was wide and the cloth loops strongly sewn. To have those loops give way and the hard-won prize go hurtling down to oblivion—that would be a joke to make all the stony fiends above grin more maliciously than ever before.

This fear came to Dussault, glued to the broiling stone overhead, and a worse one with it, that at the last moment some infernal thing within that lower blackness might pluck down not only emeralds and gold but the man who dared rifle that vault. His mouth opened to speak—then closed again, teeth clenched.

TO BE CONTINUED

# THE *Road Winds Uphill*

## *The Bowery Rescue Missioner Makes His Sign*

By EDWARD L. McKENNA

ONCE upon a time, so the corn-belt wits declare, the Legislature of the State of Illinois had three plums to give away, to whatever cities should prove most deserving of them. Joliet made the best showing, so it got the Penitentiary; Kankakee was next, and accordingly received the Insane Asylum; Urbana came staggering into third place, and to it was awarded the University.

Back about 1910 or so, a young kid named Carter, or Carver, or Jones, or something like that, matriculated at the last named institution. Along in the fall of 1919, he was discharged from Joliet Prison under a name that wasn't Carter, Carver or Jones. He'd been doing three years and a bit for an attempt upon a post-office safe.

In a way, and in only one way, the University had been responsible for his career. Right at the beginning of his freshman year, two of the brothers in the fraternity to which he was pledged persuaded him to beat his way with them to Indiana, where the football team was playing Purdue. He'd enjoyed the trip, and later on went to see the Wisconsin game the same way.

Then, during the Easter vacation, the old spring fret had come over him, and he'd hopped the rattler for a quick and dirty ride to New Orleans. The police of a little town below Cairo had picked him up, and instead of going back to college, he had spent thirty days mending the roads. There was a hue and cry about his disappearance, but it suddenly ceased when his people informed Dean Clark that their boy was visiting friends in Egypt—they'd heard from him. It was the last time they ever heard from him, or at least the last time they ever admitted hearing from him, and he never went back to college.

In September of 1912, a certain Edward James was arrested in Spokane for malicious mischief, to wit, using a railway-tie for firewood. In 1914, a person giving the name of Thomas Clark was committed for vagrancy in Kansas City. In August, 1915, one S. T. Sherman was put in the hoosegow at Fargo, North Dakota, for disorderly conduct, together with two Hunyaks, a Polack, three blanket stiffs and an I. W. W.

In November of 1916, the fingerprints of the said persons were taken for the first time, when a man giving the name of Thomas Cunningham was apprehended in the vicinity of the post-office at Ava, Illinois. In his pockets were found a can of soup not made by Campbell, and a packet of drills. This time he got the "works"—five years in Joliet.

Just about Thanksgiving Day, 1919, Carter, Carver or Jones, alias Edward James, alias Thomas Clark, alias S. T. Sherman, alias Thomas Cunningham, blew into town, to use the time-honored phrase, "in the guts of the rattler," threw his feet on the main stem of New Rochelle for a net of twenty-two cents, rode into the city of New York like a gentleman, made for the public baths at the foot of Twenty-third Street, and there he got himself fairly clean, considering. He was ragged; the cinders had burned tiny holes in his clothes; his coat had burst a seam back of his shoulder; he was hungry; he had a three days' beard and a new monnicker, Harry J. Stevens.

Look him over as he goes plodding away from Twenty-third Street and the East River. It's chilly, and taking a hot bath and venturing out into the street would give many a man pneumonia. It won't give him penumonia. Of medium size, and with good shoulders and the neck of a prizefighter, and with legs worn thin and symmetrical from much climbing, and much running from the yard-bulls.

He looks older than he is, and he's not so young at that—twenty-eight. His shirt is dirty, and his beard is black, and his brown eyes are neither shifty nor unswerving. They are not puzzled eyes, or wistful eyes, or sinister eyes; they're not the eyes of a poet, or of a victim of circumstance; they're just sort of brown eyes, that's all. There's nothing particularly remarkable about his appearance. Once there used to be Greek letters tattooed on his left shoulder, but he's had them burned out with an electric needle as effectively as possible, and a green dragon has been tattooed over them.

He continued on down town along Avenue C, then over to Avenue A, and finally over to Third. He wasn't going quite aimlessly. He wanted to see the Bowery. All out-of-towners want to see the Bowery. Heaven knows what they expect to find there.

The first thing that Harry Stevens found was the Barbers' College. He'd seen barbers' colleges before—on Halstead Street, Chicago, and East Street, San Francisco; they weren't even a pleasing novelty.

The Bowery didn't thrill him nor disappoint him. It looked to him a good deal like lower State Street, or Dearborn Street, in Chi—dark and dingy and down-and-out. There weren't any likely prospects upon whom he might inflict a highly inaccurate statement of the causes of his necessity. Once or twice he tried, without success, to promote a nickel or a dime. He'd never been considered much of a panhandler—didn't consider himself good at it. He lacked the actor's temperament, wasn't easily emotional. That was one reason why he had turned yegg. He'd rather take it, any time, than ask for it.

Down, down, down that famous street. Past the Thalia Theater, where your father and my father saw Booth and Barrett. Past the Bull's Head Cafeteria, where maybe your great-grandfather had a rye highball with George Washington. Past the Lafayette Baths, where, some say, the Becker murder was talked about. Past the Amalgamated Social Club, where they're probably talking about murders that haven't happened yet. Past the former abodes of charming women—Mary Rogers and Charlotte Temple and Lydia Thompson and Mimi Aguglia—and of gallant men—Stephen Brody, Fingy Conners, Monk Eastman, Humpty Jackson.

Past the doctors and the presidents and the Andy Horns. Past Perry's drug-store, a place as yet unknown to literature, but worthy of it, for there should be a little statue of Cupid above its portals. If you knew the stories of the romances

connected with assignations at Perry's drug-store, or the information desk at the Grand Central Station, or under the clock at Wanamaker's, or the lobby of the McAlpin— If you know the stories connected with the jewelry pawned at Simpson's— If you know what the poet facetiously termed the short and simple annals of the poor—

All this wasn't worrying the *soi-disant* Harry J. Stevens, tramping the streets in his worn shoes and with his coat-collar turned up against the damp wind. He made an inopportune touch in front of the old Tribune Building, and nearly got run in. So he turned back again to the Bowery.

Coffee, three cents. Coffee and cake, five cents. Sirloin steak, twenty-five cents. Beefsteak and onions, twenty-five cents. Onions— Stolidly he continued on. There was a place where they were toasting corn muffins in the window, and he gave it more than a casual glance. Regular Dinner, twenty-five cents. A regular dinner—

Chatham Square. Doyers Street— Spring Street. On and on. Finally, beaten at last, he slouched in to the Bowery Rescue Bethel.

A bald-headed man inside took a quick look at him.

" 'Lo, bo," he said.

" 'Lo," said Stevens. "What's the chances for scoffin'?"

The bald-headed man grinned and, drawing a pencil out of his pocket, he made a little sign, half-picture, half-diagram, on the edge of a newspaper. Stevens laughed.

"Do you make me?" said the bald-headed man.

"Gimme the pencil," said Stevens. "Kind lady, no dog, huh?" He drew a little diagram and shoved it over. "Do you make *me*?" he asked.

"Are they?" said the bald-headed man.

"Are they what?"

"What you just said?"

"What did I say?"

"You said, 'The bulls are horstile.' "

"So I did. No. No, they're not. I was just seein' whether you could read— Hey, bo, what kind of a Christer—uh, what sort of a bird is the big noise here?"

"I'm the big noise," said the bald-headed man simply.

"Oh."

"Yeah. Didn't you ever hear of me? Johnny La Verne?"

"No, boss."

"I'm no boss. I—well, the first thing you want is chow. Come on back here."

And Stevens scoffed. He did, indeed. Steak and potatoes and bread and three cups of coffee.

"Have a butt?" said Johnny La Verne. "Or do you chew?" And he extended a package of Sweet Caps.

Stevens lighted a cigaret and leaned back. Now he'd get a line of soft stuff. All right, he'd put up with it. Some chow that was.

"I ain't called you brother, you'll notice," said the bald-headed man aggressively.

"What? Oh. No, that's right."

"I ain't asked you anything. I ain't asked you for your spiel. I ain't asked you if you're out of stir, or just a bindlestiff, down on your luck. You ain't a gay-cat—I made you right away."

"No, I'm not. Want my spiel?"

"No, not now. Listen. Suppose I ask you something. I'm going out of here in a minute and leave you all by yourself. I'm gonna ask you to say a prayer when I'm gone. That's all."

Stevens looked at him steadily and silently.

"You're down and out. Maybe it's your own fault, maybe not. If it's your own fault, maybe, right here, tonight, is where you change. I don't figure you for a guy that comes in to a mission till you're pretty close to the cushion."

Silence from Stevens.

"There's nothing in it, bo. Maybe you found that out. Maybe you made up your mind already. Maybe you're figuring, well, now I got my stomach full, that's all I got to worry about, besides hitting the stem for the price of a flop. All right, here. Here's two bits. Now

you got enough for a flop and a cup of Java in the morning.

"Now I'm going out of here. The door's open. You can go any time. Or you can stay, we got services here. I'm not askin' you to stay. Stay if you want. But I am askin' you to say a prayer. Listen, bo. This may be your last chance, your last chance, see? Maybe not, too, of course. But maybe right here and now is the place you're going to turn. It's happened before. It's happened to me. It's well known what I was. I didn't learn that stuff by talkin' to bums here. I learned it on the road, and in the Moyamensing Pen.

"If you want to see me afterward, I'll be in the back. If you can't pray, or if you're laughin' at me for bein' a fake, don't wait, just go on out."

"I—"

"That's all right. Bo, I am tellin' you. I am no fake. I tell you, I'm lookin' at you and I see myself, fifteen years ago. I'm tryin' to help you."

"I—I believe that."

"All right. So long, if I don't see you again. I'll be in the back if you want me."

Johnny La Verne didn't see Stevens again that night, nor for a month afterward. Then, one night about six o'clock, Stevens called him and said he wanted to come over and see him. And Johnny told him to come over.

Stevens was wearing a new, cheap suit, and was neat and clean. They didn't shake hands—La Verne knew it wasn't usual in the circles in which they traveled, and he never tried to shake hands with any of his congregation.

Stevens told him briefly that he had a job. Selling new and second-hand clothing for Raphael Isaacs. He'd gone out with a contractor the day after he'd met La Verne. Swung a banjo-shovel in a ditch for four and a half a day, and bought the front. With the aid of the new front, he'd got the job from Isaacs. He'd told Isaacs he'd worked in clothing stores before, which was not true; however, he was getting along all right.

He didn't say whether he had prayed or hadn't prayed. Nevertheless, he stayed for the religious services, and was a respectful listener, though not a vociferous participant in the responses.

IN THE course of the next six months he dropped in from time to time at the Mission. Johnny La Verne would see him sitting there, grave, inscrutable, listening to his exhortations. Stevens' clothes were getting so much better that he looked out of place in the congregation.

La Verne's audience weren't all down and out. An occasional visitor was "Big-foot" McGurk, who had been promoted to plain-clothes by the Central Office after some years of pounding the pavements as an ordinary cop. He came to the Bethel for professional reasons.

Big-foot got interested in Harry J. Stevens. In his own quiet way he found out where Stevens worked, and in time, something of his former history. Ultimately, Big-foot made a private and personal call upon Mr. Raphael Isaacs and gave him some accurate and unpleasant information concerning his new clerk.

Mr. Isaacs received these disclosures incredulously at first and then gave way to excitement and consternation. Finally he looked at the detective just as he looked at the other two men in a pinochle game, after he'd picked up a hand containing a hundred aces, seven trumps in spades, sixty queens and pinochle, which he was about to play for a hundred and forty. He looked at him, in other words, confidently, but with a certain amount of misgiving in his heart.

"*Nu*, Mister McGurk. Maybe he could have trouble. What I know is this: He works by me a year come *Tishabov*. He comes early, he stays late. Never he lets the customer out of the store till he buys. If he don't buy, he feels worse yet than I do. Such a liar he is—I give you right there—he tells me he worked in a clothing store in Kansas City. Right away I knew that was a lie, but I don't tell him, because he does very good, for such a new beginner. Now, I tell you, he can sell

goods as good as me, pretty near. So, *gonoff* he is. If you tell me this six months ago, three months ago even, I fire him. Now, I don't fire him. We could all make a mistake once, ain't it? No, I don't fire him. And I ask you, please don't be making a big talk about this in the store."

"Suit yourself, Isaacs," said Mr. McGurk. "Don't say I didn't tell you."

Big-foot had his points. His next move was to swagger up to Harry J. Stevens, choosing a moment when there was no one else around.

"Hello, Tommy," he said easily.

"My name's not Tommy."

"Oh yes it is. Oh, yes, it is. Or was. Now listen, yegg. I don't know what your lay is, yet."

"Oh, now I make you. A harness-bull, with the harness off."

Big-foot flushed.

"Don't you wisecrack me. I'm tellin' you. You're known, see? Don't get funny. I got my eye on you, and Isaacs's got his eye on you."

"Isaacs—"

"You heard me. You watch your step."

Stevens stepped up close to him, and whispered two words in his ear, two vulgar words, which expressed everything a ringing speech of defiance could.

Strangely enough, McGurk grinned, and he looked at Stevens a little differently.

"Well, you're not yellow, yegg. Just mind I'm telling you."

And he strolled out, twiddling the charm on his watch-chain, in lieu of a night-stick.

DURING the next six months McGurk would stop in from time to time at Mr. Isaacs' store. Once he found Isaacs and Stevens together. Isaacs looked up at him.

"You want something, Mr. McGurk? If you do, I should let my young man here wait on you. He knows the stock as good as me, even."

Stevens flushed. It was the only time Isaacs had ever said anything to indicate his familiarity with the connection between McGurk and Stevens.

McGurk laughed.

"I bet he does," he said. "No, I'm just looking today."

When he had gone, Stevens laid his hand on Isaacs' arm.

"Dot's all right. Dot's all right," said Isaacs hastily. "Herry, you might at least clear off them counters while you are standing here doing nothing."

ONE DAY when Stevens was on his way to lunch, a dapper and wicked-looking young man slapped him on the back.

"Hello, Ten-sixty-seven-ninety-three," he said.

Stevens paled. Then he grinned.

"Hello, Eleven-thirty-two-o-one, when you get out?"

"Eight months ago. Let's go somewheres!"

They went somewheres. Former convict eleven-thirty-two-o-one bought Stevens a lunch and a couple of drinks. He had a big roll of bills and a new lay. Working for Kid Banger, the king of the East Side.

Stevens was going straight, he said. Eleven-thirty-two-o-one gave him a gold-toothed grin of disbelief. Stevens told him several lies, having privately decided to give his old pal from Joliet as little of his society as might be in the future.

After lunch they proceeded down Third Avenue. Who should be coming out of Allaire's but Big-foot McGurk, whose eyes widened as he grinned in recognition.

"Know that bull?" said Eleven-thirty-two-o-one.

Steven said a few short, nasty, vulgar words indicating that he knew Big-foot and didn't care for him. He explained why.

"So he's watching you, is he?" Eleven-thirty-two-o-one laughed. He'd had five drinks to Stevens' two, and besides he and Stevens had been in the same jail. "Well, he better watch out for his own self."

"So?"

"Yeah. This guy got a brother in Hoboken—it's either a brother or some broad. Anyhow, he goes to Hoboken on his day off, and gets a snootful. Come back on the ferryboat pie-eyed. Well, his day off's next Thursday, and it's his getaway day, see? A couple of chicken-pullers is goin' to bump him off, only they ain't. It's 'Kid' Banger's mob'll bump him off, see?"

"Uh."

"He ain't very well liked in Hoboken, that's the line. A couple of chicken-pullers is goin' to bump him off. He talked out of his turn to Kid Banger once too often, see?"

Stevens grinned.

SATURDAY night he went to the Bethel. He had called up Johnny La Verne and he sneaked in and sneaked out again, and didn't wait for the services. La Verne didn't urge him to stay.

Monday morning Detective McGurk got a phone call from Johnny La Verne. It was very urgent, La Verne told the man at the desk—they must be sure to get Big-foot McGurk to call at the Bethel as soon as possible.

Big-foot slouched in jauntily that afternoon. Johnny La Verne received him enthusiastically, but he seemed preoccupied. He made three or four halting approaches to his subject, while McGurk rolled a cigar about in his mouth and appeared to enjoy his embarrassment.

"Mac, I got something to tell you," he said at length.

"Yeah?"

"I—you going to Hoboken next Thursday?"

"What?"

"You heard me."

Silence.

"I hope to tell you."

"I wouldn't."

"Why not?"

"That's all. I wouldn't. I wouldn't go near Hoboken for a long time."

"Ah."

"Do you make me, Mac?"

"Yeah—who tipped you off?"

"It was no stool that tipped me off. No stool and no squealer. That's all I'll say."

"What's the dope, Johnny? Come clean."

"You heard me."

"All right. Much obliged."

Silence.

"Say, by the way, Johnny, I ran into one of your parishioners last week."

"Yeah?"

"Calls himself Stevens. Runs around with another jailbird from Joliet. The other guy is running around with Kid Banger."

"That so?" Johnny's eyes were guileless. "Say, Mac, how do you stand with Kid Banger?"

"Oh, all right, I guess. Me and the Kid have our little differences. But this Stevens—know anything about him?"

"In a general way."

"Know he's out of stir?"

"Ye—yes."

"Think he's runnin' straight do you? Don't make me laugh. Straight? Comin' up here and singin' hymns, and runnin' around with 'Skeeters' Mulligan and Kid Banger and livin' straight? Workin' in a second-hand clothin' store and readin' the Bible at night, huh? Gwan!"

"Straight— I pretty near know— Uh— Yeah, I think he's runnin' straight, Mac. Listen, Mac. You're talkin' about being straight so much—how straight are you?"

"What you tryin' to do, Johnny? Convert me? That's Father Monahan's job. Sure I'm straight. That is—well. My word's good anyhow."

"That's well known, Mac. And mine's good, too. That's why I'm tellin' you, keep away from Hoboken. That's all I'm goin' to tell you."

McGurk stretched himself and laughed, and he put his big ham of a hand on La Verne's shoulder.

"Now, you big stiff of a preacher, you keep this to yourself, see, what I'm goin' to tell you. All right? Well, I got a dame in Hoboken. That's who I got to see on my day off. Everybody thinks it's my

brother. Hunh'. I go and see her, see? She expects me, Thursday. And I'll *be* there.

"I'm not sayin' I won't have a gat under my arm, and much obliged for the tip-off. And maybe I'll stay a little sober, too—not much, just a little. Who is it, some friend of the dame's? All right, never mind. Well, I must be goin'. Lemme tell you somethin' before I go. I bet you fifty bucks your friend Mr. Harry Stevens is in stir by Christmas. What'll you bet?"

"I'd bet you fifty, if I was making any bets. But you know I ain't."

"And I'll bet you fifty more I'll go to Hoboken and breeze up and down Washington Street at four in the morning and there won't be a louse in the world to look crooked at me. Wa-agh, Johnny, you're gettin' to be an old woman!"

"Don't you go to Hoboken, Big-foot McGurk. Don't you go, you hear me? You're up against— It's no use. I've told you all I can."

Big-foot's laugh boomed out behind him as he clattered down the stairs.

Go away, Big-foot McGurk. You've left Johnny La Verne with some pictures in his mind.

One of them is of you, coming down the dark streets in the early morning, reeling a little. Because, you'll have had a few drinks, anyhow, even if you do stay sober. As you come, a couple of people will be waiting for you. They'll have been waiting for you for some little time, and you'll have luck with you if you see them before a pump-gun begins its *rat-tat-tat*.

Another one is of Harry Stevens, the unemotional, stolid Harry Stevens, white-faced, his hands twitching, spitting out his story in La Verne's little office.

"I don't want to do it—the bum, the rat! Why should I be tellin' you—tried to get my job— Couldn't sleep—tryin' to turn square; look what he did to me! Remember what you said, in here! 'Maybe it's your last chance, your last chance to be decent, to be a square-shooter.'

"Agh—listen, McGurk the dick, keep him away from Hoboken Thursday; they got him spotted. Kid B—never mind, they're going to get him, they know the house he goes to; they're going to get him when he comes back to the ferry, early in the morning. Agh—now I'm a stool, now I'm a squealer; that's what your prayin's done for me! Do you suppose anybody saw me come in, huh? I ain't comin' back, I'm blowin' out of here; I'm goin' to K. C. Can't fight Kid Banger, not when I've turned square; what chance have I got?"

And another picture: Big-foot McGurk, gasping his life out on the pavements, while a doctor bends over him— "Banger's mob—yeah—Skeeters Mulligan—get another one, Stevens, Harry Stevens, he's in it too—Raphael Isaacs' clothing-store, Second Avenue—"

Or Big-foot himself, alive and triumphant, back home again, with his assailants in the morgue or the hospital and Harry J. Stevens on the carpet, subjected to whatever gentle persuasions are entailed in the Third Degree.

JOHNNY LA VERNE didn't sleep much that night. Bright and early next morning he went over to Second Avenue.

"How de doo! Sell you something in a nice light overcoat?" asked Mr. Isaacs.

"No, thanks. I'm looking for Harry Stevens. I'm Johnny La Verne."

"Who?"

"Johnny La Verne, from the Bethel."

"Oh. Excuse me, Mr. La Verne. You got letters or something to show who you are? Just to be sure."

"Huh. I'm in a hurry. Sure. Here's some letters addressed to me."

"Oh, well, then. Stevens, he's gone."

"Where's he gone?"

"He said I should tell you he's gone where he said he'd go."

"Ah. Kansas City."

"Yes. That's right. And I'm going to tell you something else. He's going out like a gentleman, in the day-coach, not in no freight-car. I give him a letter to my

wife's cousin, in the clothing business. Should he stick my wife's cousin, he is a good smart fellow. He never stuck me for nothing."

"Um. Don't tell anybody else where he's gone."

"What do you think I am? That young fellow—you know about him, do you?"

"Yes."

"Well, then. That young fellow, he's found out something. He's found out there is more fun in that clothing business as in—as in the line he used to was in. Me, Mister La Verne, I failed in business four times yet."

THEN La Verne called up Big-Foot McGurk again, and they had lunch at Louis' place over on Second Avenue, at a table next to the wall. La Verne ate very little, but Big-foot did terrible execution to a T-bone steak.

"Well, Johnny," he said, as he pushed his plate back. "What do you say, huh? Still worrying about Hoboken?"

La Verne looked at him steadily.

"Big-foot, I'm going to do something for you that I don't recollect doing for anybody. I'm going to welsh. Now—Who is looking for you in Hoboken?"

"Shoot."

La Verne looked around.

"It's Kid Banger," he said softly.

McGurk shot a glance at him; then he looked down at the table cloth for a second.

"Smoke, Johnny?" he said. "Better try one of these. No?"

Very deliberately he lighted a police-lieutenant's cigar and puffed at it three or four times.

"I see," he said finally. "That's—of course, that's different. Ah—who tipped it off?"

"Stevens."

"Stevens? That yegg? Stevens? Well, what do you know? He's about the last guy—I'd never take that guy for a rat."

"A rat! That's—that's—"

"Oh, Johnny—I—gees, Johnny—"

"Yeah. That's what you made out of me, you and your woman in Hoboken! You made a rat out of me, a squealer! Me that's a preacher—a—a priest. Now go to Hoboken, go on!"

"Johnny— I—I ain't goin' to Hoboken. Or rather I'm goin' to see the Kid first, and tell him where he gets off. The dirty louse, I'll show him! That's what they've come to, in this burg. In the old days, if you had trouble with the Monk or Humpty, they settled their own arguments. All right. I'm goin' up there in half an hour. Yeah, me and the Kid'll have a talk and then I guess I'll have to go and see this Stevens."

"You'll have to go a long way, to see Stevens."

"Oh. Did he blow?"

"Yep. He blew. He's gone back where he started from. He had a good job here, and good prospects. You come along. You tried to get his job, and he knows it. Then, by accident, he found out they were going to bump you off. What's he do? What's he do, huh? He tells me, and he beats it. Do you blame him for beating it?"

"What made him tell you?"

"The same thing that's making me tell you—trying to go straight. It ain't so easy. He turned squealer for you. Now I've turned squealer, too. Me, Johnny La Verne. He made me promise I wouldn't tell you who it was. He trusted me."

"Yeah. Listen, Johnny. You know where this guy is. I got to square this. I—I'd like to give you a little jack, to send to this guy, help him get started—"

"Who do you think he is? Judas? You and your jack! No. He's gone. You'll never see him again. Figure on that awhile. This is something you can't square. Never."

"I guess that's right, maybe," said Big-foot at last. "I—I don't feel very good about this, Johnny."

"No, neither would I. Don't you worry about Stevens. Stevens is O. K. He gave up everything he had, trying to live right. Maybe, right now, he's shiverin', soaked to the skin, doused with water that was meant for the engine.

Maybe he's scoffin' in some jungle. But he's O. K., see? How about you? How about you, huh? And how about me? Listen to me, Mac. Don't ever think I did this rotten thing for you. I did it to stop a murder. Get me?"

"Yeah. Only I don't figure the way you do. Anybody does anything for me, it's for me, see? I always square it. Kid Banger 'll find that out, too, don't you forget it. And now this guy Stevens. Listen. You better let me know where he is. Maybe he'll have some trouble with the bulls—out where he goes, see? Is he in Chi, Johnny? Go on, tell me. In Chi, huh? Or Denver, maybe, or St. Louis? East St. Louis, maybe, huh?"

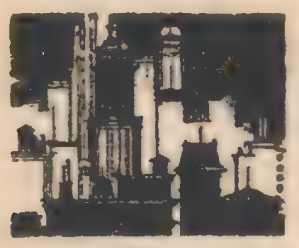
"So long, Mac. You'll never find out from me where he is. And listen. You can just keep out of my services for a while. You can leave my bums alone. I could get along without seeing you, for a long while—seeing you there, anyway."

"O. K., Johnny O. K. I'll never put my foot in your place again. Less'n I call you first. So long. I—uh—I'm much obliged."

Big-foot would have sworn that the last word muttered by La Verne as he stamped out of Louis' place into the sunlight of the avenue was uncanonical.

He himself sat there for some little time, rolling his cigar about in the corner of his mouth and scowling. Finally he laid his cigar down, and without too much ostentation, he looped the leather thong of a black-jack round a suspender buckle. The weapon itself slid down under his coat sleeve, and he tucked it in a fold of his cuff. Then he threw half a dollar on the table and rose to his feet; he was no longer scowling.

He was on his way to the headquarters of Kid Banger, namely, the Friendly Social Club, and he was going to pay a courtesy-call.



# Power

## *Ship's Log or Book of Poems?*

By ROBERT CARSE

THE FREIGHT ship, *Georgian Empress*, sank on the chief mate's dawn watch at 4:14, ship's time. She went down by the bow exactly ten minutes after ramming abeam the nearly submerged hulk of a burned-out Nagasaki collier. A leering shadow in the dawn fog, the collier loomed upon the freighter, to crunch in four of her bow plates, then disappear as eerily as she had come, only the eager gurgle of small waves through her cargo-ports to mark her passing.

Of the freighter's company, two men—the captain and the chief engineer—survived. How they got away from the vessel they never afterward clearly remembered. The captain was a methodically stubborn man. When he met the chief engineer on the after port angle of the boat deck, where the three mates had just been killed trying to subdue the coolie firemen, he handed the other an oilskinned packet.

Then, with a brief, typical gesture, he indicated the white blur of a freed lifeboat which floated off the quarter and signified that the chief follow him. Without a word, he dove clumsily, and, for a moment, the chief watched him, swimming with awkward strength toward the life-craft.

There was a hot, dry sensation about the chief's eyes and the roof of his mouth as he tucked the captain's oilskinned packet beside one of his own in the waistband of his white ducks. He, too, then, raised his arms, gasped nasally and dived.

The water hit him like flexible metal; stunned him. When he wholly regained consciousness he was floating on the surface, kicking out with arms and legs, as he had done as a kid in the swimming-hole at home. Before him, across the black water, he could still make out the phosphorescent trail of the captain's passage. Without looking backward toward the ship, he struck out along the faintly shining path.

Ahead, was the white slash of the lifeboat's side. To this he labored, panting terribly, clothes pulling like immeasurable weights on arms and legs. Fingers on the wet gunwale bar, he dragged himself along the side toward the bow, to see above him the vague face of the captain.

Even while he rested for breath and strength against the craft's cutwater he pawed with his free hand in his waistband to see if the two packets were safe. He laughed croakingly in his throat as the captain hauled him aboard; one of the packets had been lost.

The captain was shouting at him to come aft, and he hastened to obey. Wearied legs carked against heavy boards and he almost fell prone, saving himself with his hands. Cold metal struck his palms and he recognized the ship's motor-sailer. Again he croaked childishly in laughter—this was his own craft.

But the captain was jamming a broad oar haft into his hand; cursing him when he bumped it out of the row-lock. Apologetically, he got up from the thwart and gave his oar to the captain. The other set his feet on the floor-boards and strained manfully. Slowly, the boat went ahead.

For fifteen minutes or so they moved in silence, then the captain slacked at his oars and they swung about broadside to the gently lapping seas. Astern, the ship was a gun-metal cloud on the black of the sea. They both started to move, to speak, and stopped.

To them, across the slow-lisping sea, came a mumble of sound. White steam upflung toward the swaying maintop-mast. A second gust of sound wrenched at the silence of the dawn. Where they sat they could hear the whinny of steel plates snapping.

Against the soft coral of the false-dawn sky the taffrail jack-staff made a faint crayon stroke; down-lunged veeringly. Once more the whine of parting plates. A sibilance and far thunder of steam. She was gone, white water whirling across the eddies above her.

An hour passed while they sat staring at their hands, unwilling to move or speak. No sound came to them except the slurred *lap-lap* of the small waves against the boat's side, the flat little murmur of the water drops falling from their clothing to the floor-boards.

The voiceless explosion of the dawn reddened the sea, brought their features into relief. They found themselves staring into each other's eyes. It was the captain who grasped an oar haft and growled like a leashed dog when a near-sighted shark blundered into the boat's side.

The chief was the younger man; he licked his lips, whispered finally—

"Not a chance, sir?"

The captain's voice had the impersonal, metallic quality of a fog-siren heard through fog—

"No."

Then again, with a conclusive note of finality—

"No!"

For a time, then, the chief was overcome by a great physical torment and at last rested his head on the hot paint of the gunwale bar. Twice the captain shook his shoulder before he sat up.

"Y' got that bundle o' mine?" asked the captain.

The chief nodded weakly—

"Got one."

The captain made no audible reply and the chief did not look up. From his waistband he extracted the oilskin-wrapped packet and handed it to the other man. The chief's hands went back to their former position, across his forehead, forming a prop for his head. Through his fingers he could just see the captain unwrapping the packet.

The after-effects of his nausea were still upon the chief; he stared apathetically as the other twitched off the last wrapping. Momentarily, the captain held three thin, leatherbound volumes in the palm of his hand. Then he tilted them on the floor-boards. His voice was still quite impersonal.

"What are them?"

"Books," explained the chief with sudden good-nature. "Books of—poetry."

Incuriously, he watched the captain's blunt fingers tense and vibrate.

"What?"

"A second edition of Lovelace, a translation of Catullus, and a Venetian edition of 'Don Juan'," said the chief in a low,

ponderous voice, as if talking to himself.

"My sextant an' log-book was in that packet I handed yuh," said the captain, still without vehemence. "Th' only reason I give it to yuh was because I had th' small strongbox myself."

They were both silent and the chief did not yet choose to look up from his inspection of the floor-boards.

"An'," he heard the captain say at last, "them—things, there, is books o' poetry?"

"Yes," said the chief after a pause. "That's right."

That was the last word spoken between them until dusk smothered the flame of the sun and a cooling wisp of breeze blew out of the westward. During the long day neither man had done more than move his hands and feet. The captain, a big, unwieldly man, sat on the bow thwart facing aft; the chief in the sternsheets, his nervously mobile face almost expressionless.

Not so the captain; he was consumed by a great—and to him—righteous rage. For, in his belief, the younger man's loss of sextant and log-book was an irreparable wrong. At the time he had given the engineer the packet to carry for him he himself had been burdened with the ship's tin strongbox, which contained several thousand dollars in cash and a number of valuable records. That he himself had voluntarily let go of the heavy strongbox he did not for a moment consider as extenuation for the chief.

THE CAPTAIN was a man of virile likes and dislikes; he possessed a violent antipathy for all chief engineers in general and for this one in particular. The captain's animosity was a thing of long-standing, of slow development. He was a man who had grown old in the service of the sea; lived from the time of his birth beside it or on it.

The first fine years of his early manhood had been spent in the last ships of the fast waning clipper-ship era and from his contemporaries of that time he had gained a lifelong hatred for all men who in his own words, "had sold themselves for easy billets" and gone, as masters, mates and deck-hands, in the steam-propelled freight and passenger ships. Paramount, and even somewhat distinct above this, was his antipathetic feeling for those who had made possible the deflection of the deck officers—the engineers, stokers, oilers who moved these ships of steel and foul-stenching smoke.

This particular hatred had, in the end, submerged and effaced the other, for he himself had eventually been forced to ship as a steamship captain, or relinquish the sea entirely. Closer contact with chief engineers and their assistants had not bettered the situation any.

He had found them, as a rule, quiet, self-effacing men as far as their own duties were concerned, but immediately bellicose when any encroachment was intended upon their designated field. It was one of the fetishes of the captain's existence that he—and he alone—was master of the ship he sailed. And only after stubborn years of disillusionment did he learn that this was not so; that he *and* the chief engineer mutually conducted the ship upon her course and were, again mutually, responsible for her prompt arrival in her port of call.

This realization and its consequent readjustment had taken a cancer-like growth upon what native good humor he still possessed. He became surly, taciturn with his chief engineers, instructing chief mates and boatswains to act as independently as possible without the assistance of the engine-room department. Such matters as water for the deck-hose, steam for the cargo winches and the exchange of petty running gear between deck and engine-room storelockers were handled in whispered, surreptitious meetings, and efficient boatswains never made more than one trip in his ship.

To the *Georgian Empress* he had brought this reputation when he had assumed command of her in San Pedro for her voyage to the Japanese Islands. Twelve hours after he had been aboard, and five minutes after the chief engineer

had foolishly ventured onto the flying bridge, deck force and engine-room gang were thoroughly aware that their commander had not left his likes and dislikes behind him in his former ship.

The chief was a young man, somewhat of a philosopher; very desirous of making a good record and gaining promotion to one of the line's trans-oceanic passenger packets. He had accepted the captain's attitude as something purely impersonal which could easily be put up with for the time being. But now, as he stared curiously down the length of the boat at his commander, he realized that he had been wrong.

The captain's heavy-featured face was reddish and sullen in the dusk glow. Broad lips were set in a truculent line of anger, and it was the chief's immediate impression that the other was seriously considering throwing his companion overboard.

In this he was not far from wrong. Several times during the hours that had passed since the disappearance of the *Empress* the captain had begun to consider the best method of getting the lifeboat under way and making for either the center of the east-west ship lane or for the Hawaiian Islands. But always his thoughts had been marred, if not entirely obstructed, by his vivid hatred for the man sitting opposite him, who had been such a clumsy-fingered fool as to let sink sextant and log-book, and save a packet of books instead. Poetry books at that! The reason, if any, the captain could not understand, and therefore his anger was increased.

Any thought of their comrades' fate and that of their ship was entirely obliterated from both men's minds. All they were aware of was their hatred for each other. The chief was a scholar, a lover of poetry; he had saved the things he treasured most. That he had lost the captain's valuable possessions he could do no more now than forget. It had been a thing over which he—who had been swimming for his life—had had no control. Still it was obvious that the captain had no conception of this and seemed utterly lacking in any desire to acquire one. The chief glowered back.

THE GOLD-POWDERED purple of the dusk was almost gone when the captain straightened up and stretched his aching arms and legs. Night was only a few moments off; the wind was picking up rapidly. They had not eaten or drunk all day. The captain was above all else a sailor. The thought of wind, of swift progress before it, even now stirred him from his brooding.

He came abruptly to his feet, looked about him in the boat. The craft they were in was the pride of the chief engineer's heart—the motor-sailer of the freight ship. She was equipped with a powerful two-cylinder motor and, according to the allotment of life-craft to the various ship's officers, she was the chief's boat, to be navigated and commanded by him in time of distress, and he had conditioned and respected her accordingly.

The chief was conscious now that his plans and actions concerning the motor-sailer did not meet with the captain's approval. His boat-mate's glance was fixed scornfully on the four big gasoline tins which were neatly stowed and lashed in the fore-space of the craft. Toward these the captain now gestured.

"You load these in her?"

"Yes," answered the chief promptly. "I did."

He was about to continue that he had done so after gaining the consent of the port captain in San Pedro, but did not. Suddenly, he realized that here—at last—the other possessed complete power of command; power which the captain had lacked, through custom and law, aboard the larger vessel, where each man, up to a fine point, had his own department, his own duties and subordinates.

But here, when the other gave him an order, he must obey it or take the consequences. The chief said nothing, still keeping his motionless position on the stern thwart. He looked up only when he heard the captain's voice.

"Git 'em overside, then. We ain't got no space nor use for 'em."

The captain turned away and began to ransack the bow-locker busily. Without answer the chief did as he had been ordered, dumping three of the four tins into the sea before he was commanded to stop. He wiped the sweat from his face and watched the swift, competent motions of the captain.

The captain was speedily rigging a spare boat-cover on to the two long-hafted oars, using a marlin-spike point and a coil of half-inch Manila line. He interrupted his work from time to time to look fleetingly at the cloud wrack above them. At last he was done; the rude spritsail rig was stepped abaft the amidships thwart and the after edge of the motor-well.

To his surprize, the chief heard the captain begin cheerfully to whistle "Reuben Ranzo". He looked aft. The captain was half-sprawled across the stern-sheets, sheet-rope in one hand, tiller handle in the other. It was the chief's impression that the captain was smiling as the craft found her wind and began to surge jerkily ahead, water hissing and purling about her bows.

Before exhaustion completely claimed him, the chief went forward to the bow-locker and brought forth some of the tinned food contained there. He ate and drank sparingly, then slumped against the cool smoothness of the gasoline drum, the sound of the sail thrumming in his ears like the flapping of a giant seagull's wings. Finally, he slept, jacket lapels high about his throat, head on his crossed arms.

The next twelve days passed like great carven jewels across their memories, while they sailed steadily to the southeastward under the whispered thrusting of the wind. To the sun-drugged chief, sky, sea, dawn, noon and sunset took on the qualities of a kaleidoscope, registering in turn, topaz, emerald, lapis lazuli, sapphire—

He had the drowsy sensation of living in a partly comprehended dream. He was comfortable; there was plenty of his favorite brand of pipe tobacco and a supply of matches which he had stored himself in the locker in Pedro; the food was plain, unchanging, but made palatable by the hunger aroused by the long days in the sun and spindrift; the water in the bow-butt was tepid, getting flat, but still drinkable. And the other man never bothered him. The captain deserted his helm and came forward only to eat at dawn and sunset, at once returning, without speech, to his post in the stern again.

That they were now headed for the Hawaiian Islands, instead of waiting for another ship to pick them up in the regular travel lane, was all that the chief knew or cared. His determinedly silent companion was an expert navigator; had early possessed himself of the patent compass from the bow-locker and daily trued their course by magnetic needle, sun and stars.

Their craft was stout, well-conditioned, with enough water and food aboard to last the two of them, who were expending very little physical energy, at least a month and a half, if not much longer. There was nothing, then, to be feared except sun-madness or a typhoon.

Idly, the chief thought over the strange situation now existent between himself and his companion. The serene peace of the days which had just passed had clarified his thoughts and he told himself that, now, his momentary anger gone, he could understand almost completely the captain's attitude toward him and all engineers.

This other man was one of the last of that legion which had occupied a major part in the losing fight waged by sail upon steam. One, who ever since, had not forgotten the glory of the power which had once been his. The power of command—now regained in this infinitesimal lifeboat for the first time in years.

Rather tragic in its way, when you figured it out, mused the chief. But—awkward for all hands involved. That, of course, was the skipper's fault. He naturally resented the fact that sail was gone from the sea forever and would never return. That, with its passing, had

come a new era and a new class of men to the sea: the engineers—the men who disputed that power of command and took some of it to themselves as their own due.

That was it, simply. Only, the old sea-lion here made a personal thing out of it; considered it as an affront to his own dignity and hard-earned pride to be forced to split his own power with another, especially another who had not earned the right to it in the same way he had.

Of course, the "Old Man" did not realize that the engine-room men were no more usurpers than the clipper-ship men had been in their time and day. That the engine-room men, too, were only supplying a demand, just as the men who went before them had done. Proof of that was that some of these old hard-shells even despised and looked down upon the new type of steel-ship captain and officer, products of training ships, inland navigation schools and the like.

But, because the former clipper-ship man and his younger brother, the steel-ship man, now occupied the same positions and expressed the same regrets, the two usually joined hands and mutually derided the engine-room men.

Here the chief sat up a little and laughed mirthlessly. To him had come the thought that some day the marine engineer and the new type sailor would also be forced to disappear, giving way to the air-pilot and the aero-engineer.

The chief liked the word "philosophy"; he used it now. It depended entirely upon a man's personal philosophy whether or not he was happy in what he was doing now—or what was past, or ahead. Philosophy, just a little bit of it, even, that was what the Old Man lacked, mused the chief, then fell asleep, his calm young face shielded from the sun by his hands.

THE SPRITSAIL hung like a feeble ghost against its stubby mast. Flying-fish capered wantonly around the slow-moving craft, their sleek sides making a miniature mock of waves. Far to the northwestward two ships plodded, hulls down, out of sight, their stack smoke tiny pennants of disdain.

Head pillowed on his rolled-up jacket, the captain slumbered on the after footboards, the tiller clacking uselessly by his half-closed hand. In the bow the chief stood looking at the motor, then up at the sardonically cloudless sky. Personal philosophy, muttered the chief, was a lot of bilge when carried too far.

He stepped then over the motor-well guard and set to work. He bowed his back futilely over the fly-wheel, spinning it until he was purple-faced. He stood back, puffing, and glared at it. At last he cleaned out a spare oilcan, partly filled it with gasoline, primed the cylinders, tried again. Reluctantly, the motor sputtered and awoke to roaring life.

The captain twitched ominously, sat up.

"What's this?"

"Action," said the chief pleasantly, wiping his hands on a piece of waste found in a hip pocket. "We've been here almost a day looking for wind. Me—I'd kind of like to see Diamond Head, too."

"Huh!" grudged the captain, taking hold of the tiller handle. The chief said nothing but bent busily over his engine.

THE CHIEF sloped, nodding with weariness, on the amidships thwart. The steady grumble of the motor hesitated for a moment, fluttered gaspingly, died out altogether. The chief opened one eye, looked at the motor and dropped his eyelid again.

"What now?" asked the captain, from the stern-sheets.

"No gas—not a drop," said the chief tonelessly. He rose to his feet, still facing forward. "I thinned the mixture until she almost stalled a dozen times. Now, we sit—and stew in our own juice!"

The captain was surprizingly silent and the chief continued forward to the bow, where he promptly curled up his short body and went to sleep. The captain sat with his broad hands spread on his knees, stubbly chin rubbing on the neckband of his shirt.

No gas! A nice go, that. And the

young one there was mad as a hornet. Not that you could blame him. Fact of it was you couldn't. Who was it anyhow, who had ordered him to heave that stuff overside when they shoved off?

Now what?

All that he knew was that they were still about a hundred miles out of the islands. And no wind, and now, no gasoline. A fine fix—one of his own making, too. If only he could learn. No sense in going into that—he'd been all over it with himself a dozen times before. This lad forward was just about mad enough now to tell him about it, too. Own fault.

The captain smiled shortly, sadly; pulled his nose in a gesture of hidden unrest. He brightened for a moment when he thought of the ships they had just raised to starboard. But, he pondered slowly, this dusk fog was settling in about them and the first thing a big craft would know about their presence would be when she ran them down.

Sure was a nice mess—a corker! The captain changed his position uneasily, looked at the big oars. No, there was no sense in that now. At least they were drifting—but which way he couldn't tell. Maybe toward the islands, maybe not.

He rose and crept noiselessly to the bow. From the locker he took food and a small oil-lantern. With this in his hand he returned to his station aft. He lighted the new, dry wick of the lantern and belayed the thing from the head of the little mast. This done, he fell back into the stern-sheets once more, chin held in his cupped palm.

He rested so throughout the night, staring blankly into the mists which lay about the boat. Twice he thought he heard the sound of surf, the roar of wave pounding after wave. But he could not recapture the sounds and smiled wryly in the darkness. Once he spat at the floorboards and spoke softly aloud, like a man in his sleep:

"Me—an' him, there— Twenty years between us—an' he's wiser 'n me; done th' right thing; I done th' wrong— Twenty years more—an' he'll be like me—maybe —prob'ly—" The captain pulled at his nose; laughed mirthlessly to himself. "Me—my day— Him—his, now—now— Funny sort o' thing, ain't it?"

He sighed and was silent. At last, he too was asleep, snoring fitfully through his nose.

It was the chief who was the first to sit up, to stumble in his excitement against the motor-well guard and so awaken the captain. Both waited long, wishing that the other would speak. They were speechless altogether for a while then, though their unease was forgotten.

Ahead, the sun was dim orange flame through the mists. A slow breath of breeze came to them, swirling the mists. A breeze which bore with it a low, rich scent—the smell of wet earth. Of dew-studded palms, of jasmine, of *bougainvillea*. The sweetish, somehow heavy smell of rice-paddies and lush undergrowth. The scents of the whole wakening tropic island.

In low minor came a recurrent mutter. The chief brushed his hand across his face.

"Breakers?" he asked slowly.

"Breakers—that's right," said the captain beside him.

Like a receding curtain, the mists drew upward along the tinsel cords of the sun. The two men blinked, shook their heads unbelievingly.

"I'd forgot," said the captain, "that it could be as purty as that."

"Yes," said the chief at last. "You're right. So had I."

"Fishin' village," said the captain clearly, "around that p'int, there. See—where that Java-man junk is makin' from?"

"Yes," said the chief. Then, a moment later. "Yes—I do."

Slowly, almost grudgingly, they unshipped the mast and sail and clewed up the canvas. The captain placed the starboard oar in the row-lock; made room for him on the thwart.

"All right, young fellah?"

"All right!" said the chief.

They gave way together, oars flashing in the sun.

# THE GUEST OF KARADAK

## *Retribution of the Desert and the Lord of Iran*

### *A New Novelette by* HAROLD LAMB

ONCE—no more than once—have I seen a man dig his own grave. Though his eyes were keen, in that hour he was blind. Though he was favored and fortunate and a conqueror, it availed him not at all in that hour.

Concerning this man, some say—

"It was written, and what is written may not be altered."

Others—and they are the mountain Kurds—say he was led to his fate by the hand of Sidri Singh. What my eyes have seen, I have seen, and I say that he dug his own grave, unknowing.

*W'allahi*, how many men have I seen in the hour of their death? I am Daril of the land of Athir. My clan is the Nejd and we are desert Arabs. In my youth I rode with the raiding bands—yea, and the banners of the clans. In those times the sword of Daril ibn Athir was not without honor.

When my years numbered fifty and eight I sheathed the sword, being weary of the war of clan against clan. It was the moment when the soul within cries, "Peace! Make thy peace." I lingered at the sitting-place of the expounders of the Law, and the burden of their words was not otherwise.

"Make thy peace, that thy years be not troubled."

But how—in what way?

I can not read the written word of the Law. And where are the two who will agree as to the meaning of the words written? I listened, hearing much dispute, and learning little, for we of the *sahra* understand only a few words. It was said to me, "Give alms." I gave then my tents and carpets, the silver jars and the silk of Cathay, the red leather and blue, clear glass—all that my hand had plundered.

They then said to me:

"Go thou upon the pilgrimage."

And this also I did, taking leave of my followers and the keepers of my herds. For my sheep were numbered by the hundred, my saddle-horses by the score.

When I returned from Macca and Bait al-Mukkudas to my district, I found there only a few of my men, who said that the herds had been carried off by raiders. They besought me to summon clansmen and companions-in-arms and ride and recover the herds. But I made answer that I had no wish to lift the standard of strife.

Nay, the blood was thin in my veins; the mail-shirt irked my stiff bones. I could no longer run beside a galloping horse and leap to the saddle; nor could I lean down from the saddle and slit in

halves with my sword's edge a carpet laid in the sand.

"In poverty," I said, remembering some words of the expounders of the Law, "there is rest."

But who can sit in one place and eat out of another's bowl? Many men of the Nejd, remembering other days, came to me to have their wounds dressed and other ills healed, for they called me physician, praising my skill at letting blood from a vein, in judging the heat of fever. Thus the thought came to me to rise up and go upon a journey, naming myself a physician.

I would sheathe the sword forever, bearing only the unadorned blade of Damascus forging that I had carried as a youth. Daril, chieftain of Athir, would be Daril *al hakim*—the physician. I meant to see new lands and visit the throne rooms of far kings—yea, the conquerors.

With this thought I set forth in the year of the Flight, one thousand and twenty and nine.* I crossed the gulf to the coast of Iran. It is only a little way from the shore of the Nejd to the great island that lies in the throat of the gulf and to the land of the Iranis. Nevertheless, the *rais* of the vessel was afraid of pirates and more afraid of landing on this coast, though we had come to a walled town. He made me go down into a fisherman's craft, and the vessel turned its sail and went away.

I thought that I would buy a camel from these Iranis and go overland to the empire of Ind.

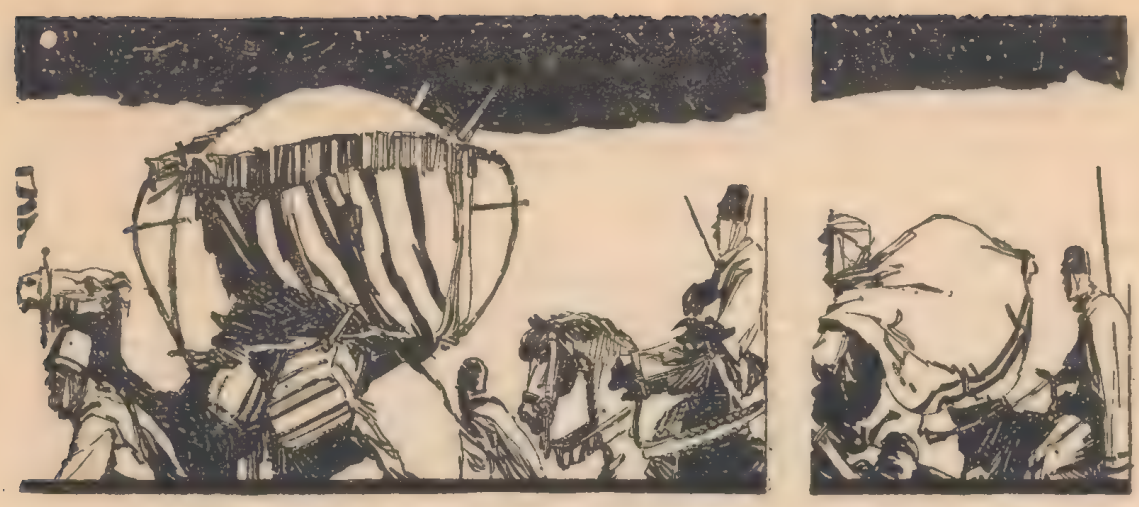
O, ye who listen, there is one thing true beyond doubt. He who sets forth upon a road may not know what the end of the road will be.

IT WAS the season of the first rains, though no grass showed in the sand, and the cattle had not been led out into the valleys. I sat within the sea-gate of Bandar Abbasi, the walled town where the *rais* of the vessel had left me.

It is a good sitting place, the shadow of a brike arch of a gate. Here may be seen those who enter with their followers and animals. I listened to the talk of the shepherds and sellers of water who entered Bandar Abbasi.

I learned that this was a new port of the great Shah Abbas, the lord of Iran. Verily, it reeked of foulness and unclean dirt—the water was bad, and the horses, for lack of grain, fed on dried fish and camel flesh. Even the goat's milk that I drank tasted of fish. Many officers of the shah came and went through the gate, the lesser men hastening from their path and greeting them with low salaams, crying—

* By the Christian calendar, 1619. At that time the four great empires of Asia, stretching from the gates of Vienna to the Malay peninsula, were—as we moderns call them—Turkey, Persia, India and China. In the narrative of Daril, Persia is called Iran, and the empire of the vastly powerful Moghuls is Ind.



"May God increase your honor!"

A *hadji* in a white turban spread his carpet opposite me and prayed in a loud voice at the hour of late morning prayer, and gathered listeners about him when he began to expound the Law. These disciples blocked the gate, and presently I heard curses.

Standing in the sun without, a Turkoman blind in one eye bade them clear his path. He puffed at a clay pipe that he held in his left hand, and he smelled of mutton grease and leather and dung. Indeed, the disciples of the *hadji* made way for him when they saw the long tulwar and the five or six knives in his girdle. The fingers of his right hand went from hilt to hilt and his one eye glared. Seeing me, he took the pipe from his stained lips, and spat.

"By the beard and the teeth of Ali—what is this?"

He blinked at my striped head-cloth and heavy, brown mantel, stared at my sandals and spat again.

"A dark, thin face. Ho, here is an Arab from Arabistan. Who art thou?"

"One who seeks the road to Ind," I made response.

"I know it well." The Turkoman came and squatted by me, on the side of his good eye. "It runs north along the river, then through the dry lands where the wells are a ride apart. Now, it is a hard road; but after the first rains there will be water in the mountain gullies."

He pulled at his thin beard, eyeing me shrewdly.

"Ho, thou wilt need a companion to show the way, or horses—good mountain-bred beasts that will not give out—or weapons."

"Nay."

"Never say that." He wagged his head, his breath reeking of sour wine. "My brother, I know the track to Ind. I know the Kurds who will raid and rob thee, and the seven-times accursed road-guards of the Iranis who will lift thy wallet from thee as a price of their protection."

"Of thy wisdom," I made response, "canst tell me the hour of buying and selling in the *souk*—the market-place?"

"In Bandar Abbasi there is no *souk*." He laughed. "The best of the animals were taken by the Shah's *sipahis* in the market place—ay, and the girl-slaves. Now, the owners hide them. By the head of Ali, I can fetch thee a camel that is beyond price. A Bikanir racer worth a hundred silver sequins—ay, saddled as if for a prince and fit now for the road. Come and see!"

"Nay." I had seventy silver pieces in my girdle, and no mind for an affray.

"A white camel, swift-paced as the south wind."

"And are thy words as wind?"

This Turkoman was a fellow of re source.

"Abide here, O, *shaikh*," he cried, "and by the teeth of Ali, I wager thou'lt loose thy purse strings within the hour."

Rising, he departed, thrusting aside the beggars who thronged the gateway with their cries. Thrusting his pipe in his girdle-sack, he made off as one with a purpose formed.

True to his word, within the hour he came striding back, followed by a Baluchi with greasy ringlets, who tugged at the nose-cord of a camel. And this, indeed, was a Bikanir fit to mount the courier of a king. Small in the head, smooth in gait, with belled trappings and a carpet saddle in place. Truly, a good beast, worth fifty silver pieces in the Nejd. The Baluchi made the white camel kneel near the brick arch of the gate and, when I had considered him, I offered thirty sequins.

"Now by all the companions and the ninety and nine names," swore the Turkoman, "this Arab would pluck the gall out of thee, little brother. I will attend to the matter, on thy behalf."

The Baluchi only smiled, twisting the cord in his fingers. He said the camel would bear a man forty leagues between sun and sun.

"At eighty pieces, this man makes no profit," put in the warrior.

I thought that the Baluchi might make little profit, indeed, for the tribesman meant to extort something from him.

"For the saddle also," I said, "I will give thirty and eight."

"Even an Armenian would pay more. With such a beast thou canst fly from all pursuit."

No doubt he thought me one of the Arabs who escape across the water from their foes. He knew much of the world, this Turkoman.

"From thy brother thieves?" I asked.

"Ho—from the ghosts of the dry lands, or the *ghils* that ride the winds. Nay, thou art bold of speech, O *shaikh*, and like unto a piece of my liver." He whispered hoarsely in my ear. "I will cheat the Baluchi who hath no more wit than a blind dog. I will persuade him to yield thee the racing camel for sixty and five sequins of full weight."

Thus we disputed the price, the Turkoman haggling loudly, now calling me his foster-brother, now cursing me for more than a grandfather of all usurers. In the end his haggling brought him no good. About mid-day came kettle-drums down the street, and a thudding of hoofs in the dirt.

Crowding against the stalls on either hand, through rising dust, came a cavalcade of horses toward the gate. The leading riders cantered past, and I knew them for *Kizilbashis*—Red Hats—the cavalry of Iran. They carried leather shields and tufted lances. They wore good mail-shirts and the wide, red, cloth turbans that gave them their name.

The men around me pushed to get out of their way, and the white Bikanir rose to his feet, lurching hither and yon, so that the horsemen cursed, and one drove his stirrup into the belly of the Turkoman, who was unsteady on his feet and not inclined to move.

Before the warrior could get his breath, the *Kizil-bashis* were gone and a cavalcade of officers trotted through the dust. I saw the cloth-of-gold turban of a *Sipahi Agha*, a captain of cavalry. The best of the horses was a dun-colored mare.

This mare swerved and halted beside me. Its rider held a tight rein and sat in short stirrups. Upon him he had no mark of honor save a heron feather for turban crest. But the long, curved dagger in his girdle was gold-sheathed, with an emerald of great size upon the tip of the sheath.

"I will buy thy beast,' he said to the Baluchi.

Those around me knelt and beat their foreheads in the dust—all but the Turkoman who had drunk too much wine, and was angered, besides.

"Forty and five sequins were bid," he grumbled. "By the breath of Ali, my lord, thy price should be not less than that."

"Who bid the sequins?"

"He!" The thick-headed tribesman beckoned at me.

"And who art thou, O Arab?"

"Daril ibn Athir, of the Nejd."

"A warlike clan. Thy mission?"

"A *hakim*, journeying to Ind by the northern track."

The rider of the mare turned slowly and looked down at me. His full brown eyes were clear and alert. His body was thick and strong, his broad face sallow, his beard dark and close clipped upon a wide chin. A man, I thought, sure of his strength—quick to anger, and accustomed to obedience.

This bearded Irani was leader of the Red Hats and, beyond doubt, an officer of the shah. From me he turned his attention to the camel, impatiently, and spoke to the servant who rode behind him. At once this follower counted out some silver-pieces from a purse and cast them on the ground before the Baluchi.

"I bear witness," shouted the Turkoman, bending over to count the pieces, "that the sum sufficeth not. Here are no more than twenty sequins."

The rider of the dun mare seemed to smile, and spoke again. A foot follower hastened forward and caught the nose-cord of the camel from the silent Baluchi. I looked for a tumult and outcry, since the bearded Irani had acted against the custom of open sale. Indeed, the Turkoman began to bellow like a wounded buffalo.

"*Hai-hai!* I bear witness, O *hadji*, the payment sufficeth not. Give heed, O *hadji*, and judgment—for this man hath been wronged and his property taken from him. Hearken to the complaint, O thou of the pilgrimage performed."

Then the throng turned to look at the expounder of the Law who sat across the street with his pupils. Indeed, he wore the white turban of wisdom and authority. His fingers trembled upon his beard, and his eyes went this way and that. But he spoke no word of blame to the rider of the dun mare.

In my land, across the gulf, the chieftains obey the customs of the clan, but here in Iran it was otherwise. In a moment I saw the proof of it.

Three of the Red Hats dismounted, at a sign from their leader; they ran suddenly at the Turkoman who was too bewildered with wine to take heed. One caught his arms behind his back, another seized his girdle and beard, while the third drew a small and thin knife.

The Turkoman fought, like a buffalo, twisting and bellowing and butting. Eh, the moment had gone by when he could have drawn his weapons—and what avail to struggle without steel in the hand?

He went down, and the dust rose as they rolled about. Before long the three soldiers held him beneath them, and one of them lay across his chest, gripping his head. The thin knife was given the one who lay thus, and while the Turkoman screamed, the wielder of the knife thrust suddenly, once and again. Then the soldiers rose off the man and went to their horses, the one with the dagger wiping it clean on my cloak as he pased.

"Say, O physician," cried the rider of the dun mare to me, "was it well done? Did the knife do its work?"

*Wallahi*—I saw then the face of the shaggy Turkoman, with blood running freely from under his brow. His lips drew back from his teeth—long, yellow teeth. No longer did he scream, but he panted with long gasps. His pallid blind eye rolled hither and yon, seeing naught. Indeed, he would never see again, for the knife had been thrust twice through his good eye.

"Truly, O my lord," I made response. "He is blind, but I bear witness that the deed was not well done."

And when the men of the Irani had withdrawn from the tormented one, taking his weapons with them, I stooped and began to staunch the flow of blood with a cloth from my girdle. The bearded rider reined his mare over against me, and I feared that punishment would be my lot, for I had spoken in anger.

"By the Ka'aba," he laughed, "physicians are like to the readers of the Law, being jealous of another's work and clamorous for reward. So, take this, and

mend, if thou can'st what my man hath clumsily done."

A heavy gold coin fell beside me in the blood-spattered dust. The Irani noble wheeled away; his men mounted and fell in behind him, thudding through the gate. The Baluchi hastened to gather up his coins and come and squat by me. But the Turkoman, when I would have bound his head, thrust out his arms and rose up, staggering. He cursed the rider of the mare, and I knew then that the name of the Iran who had blinded him was Mirakhon Pasha.

"This was to come upon my head," said the Baluchi as we went from the gate. He spoke sadly, thinking of the little price that had been paid him for the camel, and I also thought with regret of the white Bickanir, because my desire to leave Bandar Abbasi increased within me.

"Still," muttered the Baluchi, "it was worse for him. He spoke in the teeth of Mirakhon Pasha. And he tasted his reward."

"Justly?" I asked, thinking of the *hadji* and his saying that men should taste of their deeds.

"*Vail*" The Baluchi shook his ringlets and smiled. "Mirakhon Pasha is the master of the horse. If he did not use torment at times, men would not fear him."

"But he wronged thee in the matter of the price."

The man from the desert looked quite troubled, but presently his eyes brightened.

"Perhaps he had need of a camel. He goes upon a journey, it is said." And he looked at me eagerly. "Come, my lord, I can show thee other beasts that will please thee."

And before the evening prayer I bought a camel of him, with cloth and ropes for the saddle and a water skin, paying thirty and two silver pieces for all. Then I weighed the gold coin in my hand, the *tuman* that Mirakhon Pasha had tossed me.

"Canst find the Turkoman again?" I asked the man from the desert.

He nodded, saying that a wounded buffalo is easily tracked.

"Then bear him this," I said, "as a gift to the afflicted. Watch, then, that others do not see and take it from him."

This the Baluchi promised to do, but he explained that the Turkoman would not live long because the warrior had many enemies in Bandar Abbasi who would take his life in requital of old wrongs, now that he was helpless.

"O *hakim*," he said at parting, "thou art an old man, treading the way of justice. Take care, upon the road. It would be well to wait for the great caravan of Mirakhon Pasha, who also takes the northern road to-morrow, through the mountains to the salt lake on the way to Ind."

But I thought of the Red Hat riders and the scarred face of the drunken warrior and of the trembling fingers of the *hadji* who had been afraid to speak. And when the Baluchi had gone upon his mission, I listened to the talk in the alleys and coffee stalls. Men spoke often of this caravan, and I learned the reason of its setting forth.

MIRAKHON PASHA was the favorite of Shah Abbas, lord of Iran. Having the ear of the shah, he could gratify any whim without harm. No one dared complain of his deeds, and many stories were told of his strange entertainments. He himself did not drink wine, but it pleased him to make others drunk when they were sitting at supper or coffee. He would give his guests first the wine of Shiraz, and then the full white wine of the mountain vineyards, then spirits, both hot and cold. It angered him if a visitor refused the cup. More than one worthy person who angered Mirakhon Pasha was beaten from his threshold by the cudgels of his slaves—yea, beaten through the streets with great outcry.

The favorite of the shah was best pleased when his guests became maudlin. When they quarreled, or rolled upon the carpet among the dishes, he clapped his hands. And perhaps his ears caught

many inklings of secrets, at these drinking bouts. Once in the fort of Bandar Abbasi, he sent for the daughters of the chief men and made them drink wine in his presence.

Indeed, then some of the *hadjis* murmured publicly, and—hearing of this through his spies—Mirakhon Pasha summoned them, and said, smiling:

"Is it true that the people of Bandar Abbasi did not enjoy my entertainment? That is hard to believe, because I summoned jugglers and wrestlers and the best of my boy dancers and gypsies to perform before the *hanims*."*

He had brought in a throng of ignoble creatures that he carried about with him for amusement, to perform their antics before these women, thus adding mockery to shame. And he had enjoyed himself very much.

"Eh," he said again, "if the entertainment was not sufficient I will call in the officers of the Red Hats the next time."

Thereupon the people of Bandar Abbasi grumbled in secret, and praised Mirakhon Pasha loudly, when he rode forth. Was he not the milk-brother of the shah? They had been nursed by the same woman, and the great shah always remembered this tie between them. Besides, Mirakhon Pasha pleased him.

For the favorite of the shah liked to wrestle with the heaviest of the wrestlers; he was a daring rider, and so great was his love of hunting that he seldom was without a leopard on his crupper, to loose at antelope, or a falcon on his wrist.

He could put a swift horse to utmost speed, and throw three javelins, one after the other, into a mark as he passed. Because of his great strength and sureness of eye he was dangerous with the sword—in either hand. And when he drew a weapon he seldom sheathed it without slaying a man or a woman.

Perhaps because he trusted Mirakhon Pasha more than others, perhaps because he feared him a little, the shah had given command for him to go as ambassador to the court of the Emperor of Ind, to carry some valuable presents. And because pirates infested the gulf at this season, Mirakhon Pasha had given up the idea of going from Bandar Abbasi on a ship, and was preparing to go over the desert road to the north and west.

Thus said the people in the market place of Bandar Abbasi, concerning Mirakhon Pasha, the lord or master of the horse. And when I had heard all the tale I meditated and decided to set out alone upon the road. In setting forth, no man knows whether good fortune or calamity awaits him, but if he rides alone, at least, he will not suffer from evil companions.

AND I had little in my bags. No more than sufficient millet and salt and rice and dates. What more is needed? I had, too, the copper pot and a slender knife and a bow with forked arrows for striking down quail and sand grouse.

Except for my sword, with the damask work upon its blade and the ivory-and-horn hilt, and the silver in my girdle, no thief would covet aught of mine. Indeed, I have found that thieves come oftener to seek the goods of merchants and to hold them to ransom, than they come to trouble an old physician who would fetch a small price as a slave.

So, as I had done in the Nejd, I placed my saddle-felt in a sandy hollow that first night. Here the road ran by a river of salt water, but I made my fire near a stream where the water was sweet and good. And, as in my land, I gathered roots and brush and tamarisk boughs sufficient to keep the embers of the fire aglow until dawn. This we do, so that a stranger may not miss our camp and our hospitality.

It is an old custom. Sometimes it brings strange guests. God knows best. That night the camel was already grunting in its sleep, and I had thrown more brush on the fire. I wrapped my mantle closer to my shoulders and loosened my girdle. The first quarter of the night had passed, but already the ground was chill. I was ready for sleep, because old blood courses slowly through the veins, and the blazing brush gave out a good warmth.

* Ladies—wives and daughters of distinguished men.

My head was pressed against the sand, when I heard the water-fowl flap up from the rushes, suddenly.

Eh, it was a sign. I listened, and in time heard horses moving along the hard earth of the trail. They moved slowly, often stumbling, and their riders did not speak. Drawing tight my girdle and taking my sword sheath in hand I sat up. There were two horses and they came forward as if their masters were fearful or wary.

And they halted in the outer blackness while one called—

"What man art thou?"

I rose and beckoned toward them. The voice had spoken in the Iranian tongue, yet not as one accustomed.

"Come," I bade them. "The night is cold, and here is warmth. A *hakim*, I, from over the gulf."

Then cried out a woman's voice, young and ringing with excitement:

"God hath led us aright. Here, in the *thur* we have found a physician. Come!"

Through the brush that had screened them came two men and a woman. The leader was mounted on a foam-streaked Kabuli stallion, ungroomed and lean. Lean, and haggard, too, the rider, who wore a cloak that had once been part of a dress of honor. His turban was small, of a kind strange to me, and rings gleamed in his ears. His cheeks were fallen in, his eyes sunken, and he swayed in the saddle, supported by a wild-looking servant, armed with sword and shield. I thought at first the man on the stallion had been wounded.

"Are these the lands of Awa Khan?" he called to me hoarsely. "Can his tower be seen from here?"

I took his rein and greeted him, bidding him dismount and sit. The servant half lifted him down, though he looked like a man well accustomed to stirrup and saddle seat. When he stood on his feet he staggered, and again the follower steadied him. I saw then that the armed servant bore upon his shoulder a heavy bundle, cloth-wrapped.

"My lord," I made response, "I have seen no tower, nor have I heard the name of Awa Khan."

"That is a lie," he muttered, glaring. "All these mountains know my cousin's name, and he hath in his herds over a hundred sheep and a score of horses. His tower overlooks the dry lake, and he—and his sire before him—have had a hand in the making of wars."

"O *hakim*," the woman's voice whispered at my side. "Heed him not. He has talked thus since the sun was overhead. His strength fails. Attend him, and thou wilt not fail of reward."

She touched her arm, upon which was no more than a single silver armlet. And her long, loose hair was bound at the brow by no more than a coral circlet of little worth. Though she was veiled, one shoulder was bare—yea, and shapely, and her slight body under its thin brown mantle stood straight and unbending. Verily, I thought these travelers had in their company a fourth, invisible, whose name was Poverty. And they lacked not pride. For the servant had carried the bundle, lest it appear that his master and mistress bestrode pack animals.

While the servant spread cloths by the fire, I supported the master, and felt within his veins the heat of devouring fever. In spite of this he wore upon his body a shirt of heavy mail. Without cessation, he muttered to himself, calling out the name of this man and that, as if he were attended by many followers. Later it became clear to me that he was naming warriors who had once been his companions. Indeed, he was himself a leader of warriors, but now when his wits wandered under the scourge of fever, he imagined himself still in the midst of an armed host.

"Ho," he grimaced. "Align the spears! Is thy shield to be carried thus, Rai Singh? Where went the standard? I see it not. Nay, was it in my keeping?" He peered around him, his blood-streaked eyes moving slowly under knitted brows. "The tower of my cousin should be here. We rode far this day—far."

Thus did his mind wander from an

imaginary host to his quest for the tower of Awa Khan.

"After dawn," I said to the sick man, "thou wilt look for the abode of thy cousin. But now it is dark, and nothing can be seen."

Indeed, in this bare plain the starlight was dim, and the chill of the ground made a little mist—very different from the clear nights of my *sahra*. I helped the servant to lay him upon the bed. I loosened the turban cloth, but he would not suffer me to draw off the mail shirt. The long hair around his forehead was damp, and he breathed with swift gasps. I counted his heartbeats, and signed to the woman to come near.

"How long has he been thus?"

"Since three days. We wandered from the road, and now I think we are near a city of the Irani. Is it far to Bandar Abbasi, upon the sea? I will take my father there and he shall rest until he is well!"

"If God wills." I thought of the wearied horses, and wondered if the sick man would live to reach Bandar Abbasi. "First he must be bled—a very little."

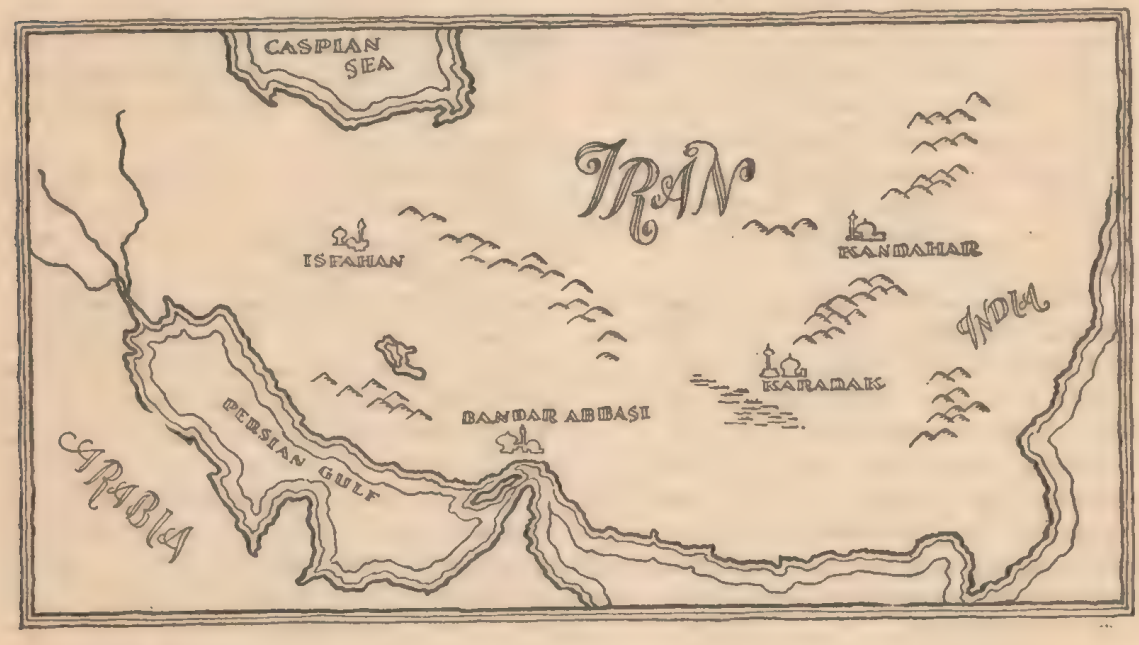
The woman then came close to me, looking into my eyes. She clasped her hands upon her breast, and I thought that she was still a child in years.

"To draw much blood—twelve ounces—from thy father," I said, "would exhaust his strength. But to take a little from him will lessen the fever."

Her brown eyes clung to my face, and, when the servant had thrown more brush upon the fire, I saw the beauty in the high forehead and the small lips and slender throat under the thin veil.

"Hast thou, O *hakim*, the skill to lay hand upon Sidri Singh, Rawul of Kukri?"

To this I assented, knowing not at all who Sidri Singh might be, but suspecting that his servant would set upon me with the sword, if harm came to the sick man from the bleeding. Indeed, the wild fellow hung about my elbow when I bared the arm of his master and drew the lancet from my girdle.




The flesh of the sick man had shrunk almost upon the bone, and the veins were clearly to be seen. I did not need to press and rub the skin, but pushed the lancet point into a vein. I had neither cup nor scales to measure or weigh the blood, but when it seemed to me that four ounces had been drawn I closed the vein with my finger and bound it. Then I bade

the servant give him boiled millet, and to keep the fire high. When this was done Sidri Singh seemed to rest more easily, and ceased his muttering.

Though it was then an hour of the early morning, the maiden and the follower would not sleep. They sat beside Sidri Singh, talking in a tongue I knew not.

Indeed I had never seen such men upon the road. They had the pride of Arabs—yea, and more. Poverty-ridden, they did not hold out an empty hand, but spoke of payment to be given me.

Sidri Singi, bewildered by fever, might have lost his way, still I thought that the maiden and the follower knew the road.

In the morning the daughter of Sidri Singh came to me and spoke of her own will, saying joyfully that her father slept still. I rose and began to build a shelter for him, against the rising of the sun, cutting tamarisk branches and weaving their tips together, when the bearded servant came up from the stream, and thrust me aside.

"He will suffer no other to tend the Rawul," she said. "When thou drewest the blood from the arm of my father, he swore an oath that he would cut thee down if the Rawul died."

A strange servant, whose pride was the pride of his master. He covered the tamarisk boughs with ragged and torn saddle cloths and stood at the entrance of the rude tent as if he were inner sentry to the lord of a host.

I looked here and there, but could not see that the wanderers had any food to ease the early morning hunger. So I soaked and heated rice enough for three, and bade the girl take her portion.

"O *hakim!*" she stormed at once. "Have I asked for alms? Have I held out a beggar's bowl?"

"And am I, Daril of the Nejd, so poor a being that guests should scorn me?"

Her brown eyes flashed and she pressed her hands to her cheeks. In the clear level light of sunrise she looked more lovely than by firelight, for her skin was delicate, and her dark hair tumbling from the circlet, gleamed freshly.

"It is my misfortune," I said again, "that guests should come when I have no more to offer them than rice and dates."

At this she tossed back the long hair from her shoulders and smiled at me. Nay, though I could see white teeth under the silk veil, her eyes half closed, smiling.

"*Ai-a*, my lord, thou art a man of birth and knowledge of what to do rightly." At once, having decided, she sat by me and ate eagerly. "I saw thy fire from far off. Hast thou no fear of thieves?"

"It is our custom to keep up the fire." And I told her how we made camp nightly in the Nejd.

"Ay," she nodded. "So did we once keep open the gate at Kukri." Then she was silent until I had wiped clean the bowl and taken it to the servant, the man she called Subbul.

The deep sleep of Sidri Singh rejoiced her who had borne the dread of sickness and the ache of hunger until now. She made merry in her way, smiling often, and asking many questions. I did not think she was older than fifteen years. Her name was Radha, and her father was a chieftain of the Rajputs. They lived on the border of Rajputana, nine days' ride to the east.

They had lost their dwellings and goods in a war, and Sidri Singh had planned to take her to the stronghold of a cousin, here in the barren plain of Iran, where she would be safe while he rode back and took his part again in this war of Ind. But when the fever had come upon Sidri Singh, she and the servant decided to turn aside to Bandar Abbasi, where the sick man could be put under a roof.

"The gods led us to thy fire, Uncle Daril," she cried again.

And she sent Subbul to see whether the horses had found grazing near the stream. Then she caught up a water jar and went herself to fill it at the stream and offer it to me. Truly, I thought that this was not wonted in Radha, for she carried the jar clumsily, yet offered it with grace, saying:

"Thou hast seen many years, Uncle Daril. Is there none to attend thee?"

"*W'allahi*, for many seasons have I wandered, companied by the *rafik*, the brothers of the road—yea, and the enemies."

"And war?"

Eh, when she smiled again, I did not refrain from boasting, telling her of forays against the Turkomans of the mountains and the Turks who were masters of Bail al-Makkudas.* To these idle tales of an old man she listened courteously, and it seemed to me that she herself had seen greater battles.

"And thy home?" she asked.

"Man's home is where his camel's saddle is," I made response and she shook her head, saying that for her there was no abode but the battlements of Kukri.

Thus we talked, the man Subbul asleep at last—having eaten—under the tamarisk, and the cool morning wind stirring the white salt under our fingers. Perhaps it was the change from suffering and uncertainty to hope, or perhaps it was no more than the food, but Radha's spirits soared, and the wine of her laughter warmed even the thin veins of an old man.

"What men are these?" she asked suddenly, springing up to stare into the sun that was no more than spear high over the plain. I turned and looked, shading my eyes.

Some twenty horsemen were cantered over the low ridges, and several of the leaders bore hawks on their wrists. One, in the center of the troop, carried a hooded leopard on the crupper of his saddle.

Even as we watched, a falcon was loosed at a heron that winged slowly over our heads, and Radha clapped her hands. The man Subbul awoke and joined us, and the twain stared at the circling bird of prey and the gaunt, clumsy heron. Farther and farther flew the heron, over the river, seeking refuge in the brush. But the rider with the leopard reined in and shouted suddenly. He had seen us. And in that moment I knew him to be Mirakhon Pasha.

* Jerusalem.

With his men he galloped over to us, leaving a single rider to follow and fetch the hawk. Sidri Singh still slept, and how could Radha hide from the eyes of the Pasha and his men? She faced them, without alarm, and the milk-brother of the Shah did not rein in until he was beside her, when he pulled the dun mare back on her haunches, and looked about the camp.

"What man is that?" he exclaimed, bending to peer into the ragged shelter where the Rajput still slept heavily.

And Subbul, who had posted himself beside Radha, strode forward without salutation.

"Silence!" he cried softly. "This is Sidri Singh, Rawul of Kukri, brother of the lord of Bikanir, defender of Anavalli, whose right is the right of beating drums to the gateway of Bikanir." * Thus he cried out the titles of his master, with the utmost boldness, as if Sidri Singh were the equal of the pasha. "My lord is stricken with fever," he said again. "Bid thy men withdraw, lest they wake him." But the dark eyes of Mirakhon Pasha lingered upon the veiled face of Radha.

"And thou, *hanim*?" he asked.

She bent her head, without coming forward.

"I pray thee, my lord of Iran, accept thy welcome from me, and ask not that Sidri Singh come to thee, for indeed he is ill."

So she spoke in her clear young voice, as if she stood among a thousand retainers, while the man Subbul dressed his shield and held high his head. But Mirakhon Pasha had eyes for no one but Radha. Indeed, as he sat the saddle of the restive mare—a horse among a thousand—he made a fine figure, in soft, green leather riding boots, and flowing *khalat*, bound by a cloth-of-gold girdle. The sword-hilt at his hip gleamed with the fires of many precious stones. The leopard at his back shifted uneasily upon its pad, thrusting its head against him and rattling its chain.

* Bikanir, the city of the desert portion of Rajasthan held by a clan often at war with Chitore, the citadel of the reigning prince of Rajputs.

It was clear to me then that Mirakhon Pasha, who had left Bandar Abbasi only an hour behind me, had come forth from his camp to hunt in the cool of the morning. He was attended by the captain of the *sipahis*, by young nobles and falconers.

"Eh, *hanim*," he smiled. "Thy welcome pleases me, and, by the breath of Ali, I would not disturb the slumbers of yonder Rajput."

To the nearest officer, he added:

"What is thine opinion, Farash Agha? Is not this better quarry than the heron?"

Farash Agha, the leader of the *sipahis*, reined forward and touched henna-stained fingers to the glitering gold embroidery of his turban.

"Indeed, my pasha! I marvel that thou didst see the beauty of the quarry from such a distance."

"Then dismount and offer her a stirrup."

At once the young officer swung down and led his charger toward Radha. Subbul stepped between them with a muttered question. The men of the pasha's following were smiling and sitting idly in their saddles as if they had watched such happenings before.

"Mirakhon Pasha," explained the *sipahi*, "begs the *hanim* to accept the hospitality of his tents and the protection of his power. Indeed, she hath pleased him rarely."

"Ay," exclaimed another. "The journey begins well. A happy omen, this."

"My lord," said Radha gravely, "I go to Bandar Abbasi."

"But not now," responded the pasha. "Such a voice and such eyes would be wasted in Bandar Abbasi."

"Come," Farash Agha urged the Rajput maiden. "My lord is impatient of delay. He hath summoned thee to his tents."

Verily, when first Marakhon Pasha had seen Radha he had been struck with her beauty. His eyes could judge a face behind the veil, and the slender form of the girl, only half hidden by the wind-whipped linen garments. He had claimed her, as swiftly as a hawk stoops from high in the air and clutches its quarry.

Why not? This daughter of Sidir Singh had no following. And the milk-brother of the shah could go far. Marakhon Pasha was no man to waste words or change his whim. If Radha had been the wife of an *amir*, with a hundred swords to serve her, he would have carried her off.

"Let not the price to be paid trouble thee," smiled Farash Agha. "My lord is generous. Is Sidri Singh thy father or husband? The price will be greater in that case."

Radha looked from him to the silent pasha, understanding now the meaning of their words. Though the blood did not rise into her forehead, shadows appeared under her eyes, and the hands, held so stiffly at her side, closed and unclosed. What she would have said then, or what Farash Agha would have done, I know not. Because Subbul's gaunt face darkened, and he drew his sword, rushing forward as if he would have struck the pasha.

He did not take three strides before a horse, swerving under knee and rein, shouldered him aside and, before he could gain his balance, Farash Agha was upon him with the scimitar. In one stroke the *sipahi* slashed open the Rajput servant's light leather shield.

Then Farash Agha parried a cut, and beat down the Rajput's guard, and passed his blade through the servant's body, under the ribs. He could use his weapon, the *sipahi*.

"*Shabash!*" cried the pasha. "Well done. By the breath of Ali, we have roused the sleeping lion."

Indeed, the clash of steel had brought Sidri Singh out of his slumber and out of his shelter. He came on hands and knees, because of his weakness, and only by grasping a boulder did he draw himself erect.

"Radha!" he called. "What is this?"

I think the fever had left him, and his brain was clear. But the strong sunlight dazed him and he turned his head slowly like a blind man, trying to understand. When he could see a little, he drew his

sword and stepped forward, his beard jutting out, his eyes flaming.

"Do not slay him!" The Rajput girl cried out suddenly, and grasped the sword-arm of Farash Agha. "Do not slay!"

But Sidri Singh still advanced, and I saw Mirakhon Pasha reach behind him. A servant thrust a javelin into his hand and he bent forward swiftly in the saddle; his right arm whipped down, and the javelin flashed in the air. Sidri Singh was not five paces distant, and the weapon struck beneath his brow, passing through his eye, the point coming out through his skull.

The force of the blow knocked the old man to the ground, and when I went to his side he was dead. Two others reached him before me—Mirakhon Pasha who kneed his mare forward to see the result of his cast, and Radha who knelt beside the body of Sidri Singh. No sound came from the Rajput, but the girl moaned, swaying upon her knees.

The other riders came up to praise the pasha's skill and swiftness. But he glanced at the sun and ordered the hunt to start again, saying that the first of the caravan would be up presently, and would spoil the sport.

Radah, rising to her feet, spoke to him. Her limbs did not tremble and her voice rang out clearly.

"Mirakhon Pasha, hast thou reckoned the price to be paid for this?"

"In gold coin or in jewels or perfumes?" he asked.

"The price will be beyond thy reckoning and it will be paid into the hand of a Rajput, though thy life be long and the day distant."

"Nay," laughed the pasha. "Is the Dark Angel then a Rajput? Sidri Singh was an unbeliever and he will look for me in vain through all the seven hells."

Then Radha covered her face with a fold of her mantle so that these men should not see her grieve. Farash Agha lifted her to the saddle of his charger, and took himself the mount of a servant.

As for the pasha, he watched a slave pull the javelin clear from the head of the dead man, and then he spoke to me.

"O Arab, is it thy fate to appear before me in the company of such dogs?"

He was thinking of the other time in Bandar Abbasi, and seemed of two minds what to do with me. In that moment, indeed, my fate was in his hands. And so I answered him boldly.

"My lord, say rather it was my fate thus to encounter thee. For I had bled Sidri Singh, and now thou hast undone my work."

He looked down at me and smiled, brushing his red finger-tips across his beard. But he did not give me leave to go.

"A bold tongue hast thou, Arab. We follow the same road. Put thyself under my protection, and ride in my caravan. By the head of Hussein, I swear thou wilt not lack patients!"

In this manner I joined the following of the Master of the Horse, for his request was indeed a command. Perhaps he really had need of a physician to attend his men, or perhaps he had a whim. He had slain Sidri Singh wantonly, and had made Radha a captive, and it pleased him to make sport of me.

FOR MANY days I did not see Radha. Mirakhon Pasha gave orders that she should travel in a panier on the same white camel he had bought at the gate of Bandar Abbasi, and that two black slaves should attend her. And word went through the caravan that she was *kourrouk*—forbidden to eye or ear. No one went near the white camel and, when a halt was made, the black slaves put up a cloth barrier about her tent. So Mirakhon Pasha made it clear that she was his slave woman.

The pasha himself did not go near her at first. It pleased him at act as if he had forgotten her, and besides, many things happened.

The caravan came to the edge of the dry lands—a sunken plain without road or village. Here the south wind sweeps the plain daily with its fiery breath. The

wells are deep, the water poor, and the wells lie a long march apart.

Though it was the season of the first rains, the sky remained clear and the watercourses empty of all save rocks and thorns. This meant that we must go from one well to the next before halting. A few men on fast camels could have done this without hurrying, but the pasha's caravan was like a moving village.

He had forty camels bearing the gifts to the court of Ind, and as many more to carry barley and chopped hay for the animals; he had his retinue, and its slaves, and the escort of seven score Red Hats, and the Baluchi camelmen. Besides, he had brought along nearly a hundred wild Kurds, lest the shah's cavalry turn upon him. Or perhaps the shah had sent the cavalry so that Mirakhon Pasha would not take the emperor's gifts for himself. I do not know.

The Kurds had their own chieftain, but Mirakhon Pasha paid them, and gave them many opportunities to plunder. Though the Kurds have no love for the Red Hats, and always make camp by themselves in their black goatskin tents, there was no fighting in the caravan. The Kurds feared Mirakhon Pasha more than their own chieftain or the ghost of the *Desht-i-Lut*—the dry lands.

Truly, he was a man without fear or remorse of any kind. He said we would set out near the hour of sunset, and travel through the night, halting at dawn to rest and eat, and pushing on until we came to the next well. And when we set out from the last village, descending into the barren plain, he gave permission to his Kurds to circle back and plunder the village.

*W'allahi*, with a red sunset behind us, and wailing in our ears, we moved down into the dark plain. Before long, even the Kurds ceased quarreling about the horses they had driven off, and the Baluchis muttered and took hold of the charms they wore on their necks.

A new moon shed light over the black wall of the hills beside us, enough light to make men and beasts appear as shadows. Here, in the gateway of the dry lands, there was silence. No wind stirred the sand, no brush crackled as the animals plodded by.

This silence of the dry plain was something I knew well; but the Iranis missed the sounds of the night in fertile land, where water runs, and birds stir in forest growth, or the wheat whispers under wind breath. Because the Kurds were mountain folk they also felt ill at ease.

"It is well known," said one who came to my side, "that this place is barren because a curse was laid upon it."

"It is worse in the day," responded another who had heard. "Then the wind slays, and the doomed have only time to cry, 'I burn,' before they fall lifeless. I have seen."

Nay, there was no end to the tales they told of ghosts that lingered in this accursed region. Finally all the talk ceased and the Baluchis halted their camels. The men crowded closer together, and all listened.

It was only a little sound they had heard, from far off. No more than a high-pitched chant, so faint that we could not hear the words or the voices of the singers. We could see nothing at all.

"It is the *illahi*," called out Mirakhon Pasha from the head of our column.

Truly, it might have been the chanted prayers of pilgrims returning from Meshed or Imam Reza. The pasha raised his voice in a shout—

"O ye of the pilgrimage performed, grant us a blessing!"

Though we all listened intently, the chant did not cease, nor did any man answer. I noticed that none of our riders galloped toward the sound to greet the other caravan.

"God alone knows," muttered the Kurd who had first spoken, "whether they be living or dead."

Mirakhon Pasha ordered the camels into motion, and mocked at the fears of the Iranis, asking who had heard a dead man sing in the *Desht-i-Lut?*

"I will bear witness to one thing," he laughed. "They who lag behind will not

live to see the other side of the plain."

He did not cease to make a jest of this fear of the caravan, and before dawn I saw how he dealt with another happening.

IT WAS in the hour of dusk before sunrise when we had halted. The Baluchis had started fires, fed by thorn bushes and the sticks they had gathered on the way. Into the pots over these fires the Kurds had thrown slices of mutton—there had been sheep as well as horses in the plundered village—and the warriors were warming themselves at the flames.

At this hour the men are sleepy and the beasts weary. The packs are not taken off, because the well is still distant an hour's ride, or two. The slaves stumbled about in the darkness, and the leaders of the caravan cursed first one and then another.

We heard a shout from one of our sentries, then the roar of a firelock. A horseman galloped through the kneeling camels, shouting for Mirakhon Pasha.

I heard a familiar sound—the drumming of hoofs, coming nearer.

"To horse!" cried the pasha, already in the saddle of the dun mare. A servant passed him his round shield with the silver boss, and he rode over to the Red Hats, calling out orders. Beyond doubt, it was a raid.

Farash Agha did not mount his horse. He summoned a score of his men and ran over to the line of kneeling camels, beyond the firelight. The Kurds acted after their manner, dashing away from the raiders into the shelter of darkness and then halting to see what would happen. Already arrows whipped by me.

All at once there was a great shouting. The raiders cried out loudly, loosing many arrows and circling the camp swiftly, trying to drive off our horses. They were long-limbed men wearing high sheepskin hats—Turkomans who had come down from the hills near at hand, perhaps to attack the pilgrims we had heard, or drawn by our fires.

They did not know the strength of the caravan until Mirakhon Pasha led his riders at a gallop through them, and turned to meet them with spear and sword. In the darkness the spear is better than the bow, and the sword better than all else. Soon I could hear the clash of steel blades.

In this moment of disorder I thought of Radha, and went to seek the white camel. A dozen of the raiders swept into the camp near me and flung themselves from the saddles to begin plundering. They ran toward the laden camels and Farash Agha ran to head them off with his twenty warriors.

So the Turkomans—who are no great fighters afoot—were soon fleeing here and there, between the fires, among the yelling slaves and the grunting camels. I soon saw the white camel, and the carpet shelter that screened Radha, and the two swordsmen who stood guard over her.

The thought came to me that I could steal up behind the watchers, and free the Rajput girl, and go with her into the darkness. After that we could certainly manage to find horses running loose.

I crept toward the white camel, with one eye on the fires, lest I be ridden down. Mirakhon Pasha was back in the camp, his horse galloping on the flank of a warrior who was turning desperately this way and that to escape. But the pasha came up swiftly on his left side and struck savagely with his scimitar. The Turkoman flung himself from the saddle to the earth, but his right foot caught in the stirrup, and he was dragged by the galloping pony.

Mirakhon Pasha did not leave him thus. He swerved and came up behind the pony, shifting his sword to his left hand. When he was abreast the raider he bent low and his curved steel blade whistled in the air. It struck heavily, and Mirakhon Pasha jerked it free, recovered and reined aside, laughing.

The Turoman lay still, but the pony galloped off into the darkness with his right foot and half the leg still fast in the stirrup. Thus the pasha with one blow severed the limb of his foeman, while both horses were at speed.

This done, he rose in his stirrups to look at the white camel. I lay upon the ground without moving. There was no way of approaching nearer to Radha, because the sky was growing light overhead, and the Kurds, who had seen how matters went, were hastening up to take a hand in plundering the bodies of the slain. Only two or three Turkomans were afoot in the camp, snarling like wounded wolves, hemmed in by the disciplined Red Hats. Their comrades had fled and the Iranis were pursuing.

So I crawled back to the fire, where the nobles were gathering around Mirakhon Pasha, praising him greatly. Riders came up with the heads they had cut from the dead raiders, and of these heads—eight or ten or a dozen—the pasha commanded a pyramid to be built.

When he saw me, the pasha shouted for me to bind up the wounds of the Red Hats, of whom nearly a score had slashes and arrow gashes. He watched me for a while, as if to see truly whether I knew my trade. Then, restless as the chained leopard, he wandered off to look at the prisoners. Only a few had been taken—three or four, and all wounded.

"They will not ride again against a caravan of the shah," said the pasha.

Evidently his men knew what was coming, for they left the steaming pots of mutton, to crowd around him, and the Kurds hastened up, grinning. I heard the pounding of mallets driving stakes into the ground, and saw that the tribesmen were being bound to the stakes. I did not watch the torture, but when we rode away I looked back and saw vultures dropping from the sky and sitting in rings around the bodies of the Turkomans who were still moaning.

So we went deeper into the dry lands, and the hills, the lair of the Turkomans, dropped behind us. And Mirakhon Pasha seemed to be in the best of humors. The raid had roused him to display his strength and, like the panther, he was no longer restless when he had struck down his quarry.

"Ho," snarled the bearded Kurd who had first spoken to me. "The kites feed well in the tracks of this Master of the Horse."

This tribesman himself looked much like a carrion bird, with his beak of a nose and his gaunt bare neck, and his little gleaming eyes set beneath thick brows. Verily, his plumage was black, for his one visible garment of black wool stretched down to his bare feet, thrust into up-curving slippers. He had girdled himself over the hips with many girdles of silk and worked leather. On his bare chest he wore a silver *talsmin*, taken from the body of some holy man.

"Is the pasha thy master, Sharm Beg?"

"*Vai*—we follow him."

The eyes of the Kurd dwelt on the striped cloth that covered my head, and it was clear that he wished to roll it and add it to his store of plundered girdles.

"And I, Sharm Beg?" I asked. "What will thy master do with me?"

"*Y'Allah!* Am I a sorcerer, that I should know? Thou art too old to bring any price as a slave."

Doubtless the Kurd thought that I had lived too long. Among his people there were sorcerers and perhaps a few priests, but no physicians. He came closer to look up at my sword, which was better than his own, and to pull moodily at his loose under lip.

"Knowest thou the way across the dry lands?" I asked.

"Ay."

"How many days?"

Sharm Beg withdrew his thoughts reluctantly from the matter of swords, and began to count on his greasy fingers, muttering to himself.

"Seven—eight days to the higher ground and the path that runs east to Ind."

"And if the water be bad in the wells—"

"*Insh'allah*—it may rain."

"And if not?"

The Kurd frowned and cursed me.

"Thou art a fool and the son of a dishonored one! Mirakhon Pasha will find his way through—ay, the very ghosts of this place will aid him. Did he not shout to them and demand a blessing?"

EVEN the Kurds feared Mirakhon Pasha. That night we found the well to be deep—ten lance lengths—and the pasha gave orders to tie the leather water sack to a long rope, and the other end of the rope to the saddle horn of a strong horse. Then he showed his men how to drive two wooden stakes into the ground, so that the rope could travel over the crossed stakes, when the horse was led away from the well. The dripping sack was drawn up to the stakes.

This the pasha did to keep his men from lowering too many water skins and wasting the water and quarreling among themselves—because the well was small and filled slowly once it had been emptied. Farash Agha stood over the well, giving water first to the nobles of the pasha's following, then to the officers of the Red Hats, and then to the men, in turn. But not all the skins were filled when we mounted and set out again.

Some of the slaves on poor horses began to lag, but the pasha would not delay the march for them. Indeed, he could not delay. Nor would he suffer them to ride the pack-camels. At the sixth camp several of the slaves did not appear at all, but Mirakhon Pasha heeded them not.

Eh, we were deep in the bed of the dry lands. And still the sky remained clear and cloudless. On either hand, red ridges of rock lined the way, rising from the gray earth. Beyond the rocks, haze lay like a veil. Above the haze on the left hand stretched the dark purple line of hills.

Under the bright sun the caravan gleamed in many colors, through drifting dust—the crimson turban and silver-adorned harness of the cavalry, the cloth-of-gold and silver of the Irani nobles, the jewel-studded weapons, the pearl-sewn saddles.

But at night, under the half-moon, all were shadows. The men moved in silence, the feet of the camels thumping in a dull cadence like the pulsing of blood through the veins. It was in the seventh night that I heard Radha's song.

God knows why she sang thus. Hidden behind the carpets on the white camel, she could not be seen. Her voice, low and clear, rose and fell. No one knew the words.

At first the rhythm of the song bespoke grieving—but it was not the high ululation of women who mourn. It had in it both sadness and reproach. Then the song changed, and rose more swiftly.

And this, beyond any doubt, was a chant of battle. Ay, it shrilled with the whine of steel and clash of cymbals, and through it ran the mutterings of drums. Every man in the caravan listened, wondering.

"It is not good," grumbled Sharm Beg, who had come up to hear the better. "It hath the sound of sorcery."

But it amused Mirakhon Pasha, who vowed aloud that when he reached the dwellings of men, he would have her sing again. And the Irani nobles made jests concerning caged nightingales.

And that night the Kurds who were leading us lost the trail. We were passing over a part of the plain where the soil was streaked with white salt and strewn with rocks. Mirakhon Pasha halted the caravan while the tribesmen scattered to search for the track. They were gone for the time it takes to cook and eat meat, and they came back by ones and twos, some saying one thing, some another. In truth, the trail was lost.

By now the moon was down in the mist—a red ball hanging over the edge of the plain. For two hours, until the rising of the sun, there would be darkness. And the men, weary of stumbling over the boulders that lay on every hand, gathered in groups and talked angrily.

I made my camel kneel and sat against him to sleep, because there was no good in moving about, and no hope of finding the trail until day. Listening to the hubbub, I heard Farash Agha reproaching Sharm Beg:

"Thou dog! To blunder on the threshold of the hills."

The answer was a snarl and a curse. Farash Agha had all the insolence of the Iranis, and indeed Sharm Beg had not been with the advance.

"The light is bad," muttered the tribesman. "We will do well to wait here."

"The caravan of the shah is not a thief's cavalcade. Find the way."

"Allah! Have I the eyes of a grave-bird, to see what is not to be seen?"

Others began to quarrel, and there was a sudden movement of feet and grating of steel.

"I tell thee, only the offspring of three dogs—"

The quarreling ceased as suddenly as it had arisen. A horse trotted up, and I heard the voice of Mirakhon Pasha, in a rage.

"O ye of small wit! O swine of the dung-heap! I will stake out the one who strikes with a weapon."

The men drew away in little groups and in a moment I heard Mirakhon Pasha ordering the camelmen to see that their beasts were bound together. I had thought he would order them to wait in their places until dawn. The delay would mean a hard march in the heat of the morrow and, if we were far off the route, hardship and suffering. But to search farther in this darkness was no less than madness.

Still, the pasha ordered the caravan forward, saying that he would lead them. All around me the soldiers mounted and closed in, and the camels roared and squealed in protest. Mirakhon Pasha went off to the left hand, in utter darkness.

For an hour we stumbled over boulders. I could tell by looking at the polar star that Mirakhon Pasha was keeping a fairly straight course, and it seemed to me that the rocks were becoming fewer. The earth looked whiter, though the light was no stronger. I dismounted from the camel, and led it, being weary of its lurching and sliding. Most of the *sipahis* were leading their horses, but the Kirds, on their shaggy ponies, seemed to be able to keep the saddle.

I felt dry rushes about my knees, and at the same time the air became chill. Mist, rising around us, hid the stars. It came into my mind to slip to one side and wait until the last of the caravan had passed, and thus ride free of the pasha and his men. Indeed, I could have done so, yet it was written otherwise.

The ground beneath me no longer had the feeling of clay or sand. At times it shook and sank strangely and the camels renewed their complaining. I reached down and brushed my fingers against the ground, putting them to my tongue. The taste was bitter salt.

"*Yah Allah!*" cried a voice in advance of me.

Then a horse screamed and plunged, with a sound as of mud quaking.

"The salt marshes!" Men repeated the words in terror, and the frightof the horses was no less. I remembered then that the merchants in Bandar Abbasi had said that at this end of the *Desht-i-Lut* there were swamps filled with rushes, where salt water, lying stagnant underground, had moistened the clay until it became as deadly as a quicksand. I sat down where I was, to wait and listen.

Yet Mirakhon Pasha would not halt. Again he gave command to go forward and Farash Agha with his *sipahis* drove the camelmen along. I was pushed and thrust into the line, and I no longer wished to turn aside, because of the stagnant swamps. It was strange to feel the riders edging in and pressing close to the leaders. Where others had gone, they would be safe.

The air grew damper and more than once I saw white fire glow from the ground. The light seemed at times to be in balls that rested on the ground, and at times to ripple and glide about like snakes. There were Kurds in back of me —judging by the smell of wet wool and leather—and they groaned aloud when these lights appeared.

They were afraid of devils, and most afraid that they would be separated from their fellows. But the camel train, led by Mirakhon Pasha, seemed to find good footing. The light no longer shone from the ground, and the sky behind us became paler. The mist turned gray, and I made out that we were climbing out of the

rushes and the salt swamps, upon firm clay.

Did Marakhon Pasha see his way in the darkness, or did his good fortune alone lead him in safety past the swamps? I do not know. The Kurds behind me said that the ghosts of the *Desht-i-Lut* guided him.

On the horizon a broad, red streak glowed and changed to orange and yellow, and soon we could see that we were walking among sandy hillocks. We were so thankful to be out of the swamps that we no longer thought of the road, or of the need of reaching water.

But when the sun struck upon our backs, we mounted into the saddle and looked on all sides. We were drawing nearer the mountains, and presently one of the Kurds cried out—

"Water!"

The horsemen trotted forward and the officers hastened to approach Mirakhon Pasha and praise him. For, below us, there lay a long pool of blue water in a sandy hollow. Before the sun was spear high we had reached the hollow, and the camels were kneeling, while the slaves hastened to put up the pasha's tent and the shelters for the officers and Radha. I went down with Sharm Beg to fill my goatskin at the pool, and I saw him kneel suddenly and dip up water in his hand. He drank a little and spat it out.

The water was bitter salt.

SHARM BEG vowed by God that he would not be the one to bear Mirakhon Pasha the word that the water was bad. He lifted his goatskin, shook it, and glared at me. Then, with one accord, we both walked to the highest knoll behind the camp, to look about us.

Eh, it was a strange place to which we had come. Here and there in the hollows were blue pools like the one we had left. To the east lay the long depression of the swamps, gray and green. All around us glittered and sparkled the white salt crust, save where red rocks reared up and cast black shadows.

The very air tasted of salt, and though the sun still hung low over the plain, heat rose from the earth and beat down from the sky. I remembered, then, that the merchants of Bandar Abbasi had warned me of this sea of salt, this dry sea.

By now the slaves had discovered the secret of the pool, and down below in the camp many figures moved about the striped silk pavilions. Only the white tent of Radha remained unopened, watched over by the blacks. The *sipahis* posted as guard over the forty camel-loads that held the Emperor's gifts, gathered in little groups. Mirakhon Pasha did not appear at all. The heat down in the gully must have been great, and he remained with the nobles in the pavilions.

"They have wine," said one of the Kurds who came up to us.

All the tribesmen climbed the height to escape the thrice-heated air of the hollow. Sharm Beg and their cheiftain sat in the shadow of a large rock and the others curled up near them, to sleep. I drank up the last of the warm and ill-tasting water in my sack, because by evening thirst would grow upon these marauders and, though they would not ask water of me, they would then take whatever remained with me. Nevertheless, I chose to stay with the Kurds rather than join the Iranis who knew no better than to drink up wine in such a place, and heat their blood to torment.

I could hear the Kurds talking among themselves, and at times, when one spoke in the Irani tongue, I understood that they were weighing the worth of the treasure in the forty camel-loads. They knew that Mirakhon Pasha was lost in the dry lands.

"The camels will go well enough for two days," observed Sharm Beg, "but the horses are good for little more."

At such a time, when the road is lost, and the men are restless and uncertain, each follower begins to think what he himself may have to do. And the thoughts of all the Kurds were upon the shah's treasure. Some said they knew beyond doubt that the camel-loads held many

pieces of gold-inlaid mail, and rolls of silk of Cathay, sewn with pearls and sapphires. Others vowed they had seen solid rock turquoise among the gifts, and weapons of Damascus work.

"The jackals looked up at the eagle's nest!"

Sharm Beg mocked the speakers, meaning that they hungered for what they could not seize. Loot is ever in the thoughts of the Kurds. They looked like vultures, sitting thus on their haunches, staring down at the weary men and the gaunt horses in the pasha's camp. But greater than their desire for loot was their fear of Mirakhon Pasha.

I wondered what I would do, in the place of this lord of Iran. The horses could not be used before sunset. If water and grazing were not found the next day, they would be at the end of their strength.

To save all his men the pasha must leave his loads—all his loads—here by the pool, and mount his people on the camels. And which way would he go?

It seemed to me that the caravan route from which we had wandered lay back of us, beyond the salt marshes, to the east. So thought the Kurds. Could he lead the camels back, across that treacherous ground, in the darkness? The well might be far.

I slept, and did not rouse until the sun was near the hills in the west. The Kurds were muttering again, and below me resounded a tumult of flutes and kettledrums. It came from the pavilions of the Iranis, and I wondered if madness had come upon the followers of the pasha, until I remembered the buffoons and minstrels.

Eh, the wind made itself felt at last—the south wind that is like the breath of Jehannum, burning the skin and torturing the eyes. It swept among the tents, billowing the pavilions and raising a haze of dust. And the flutes and pipes made a mad kind of music for this dance of the wind.

"Look!" cried Sharm Beg, thrusting his foot into my ribs.

I rose, gripping my sword, but did not draw it. Among fifty foemen, what avails it to draw a weapon? Sharm Beg had reason in a later day to remember that he put his foot upon me. He was looking up at the sky, and I saw that heavy cloud banks had hidden the line of the western hills—clouds that moved up from the south, and soon hid the red ball of the sun.

The sky darkened and the Kurds hurried down to the camp to saddle their horses. They knew as I did that the heat and the scorching wind and the blackness meant the coming of rain.

The pavilions were being taken down, and the Baluchis struggled with the camels' loads, while the kettle drums whirred and the pipes shrieked. Surely the wine was in the blood of some of those Iranis.

Farash Agha stood at the stirrup of Mirakhon Pasha, who waited until the *sipahis* were in the saddle, and the camels roped up. He waited for no more, but gathered up his reins and trotted off. Nay, he did not turn back to seek the trail. He circled the pool and led the way toward the distant hills.

In a moment I understood why he had done this. The rain that was coming might not reach this part of the plain. But the storm would surely break down the slopes of the mountains and there, on firmer ground we would find the watercourses filled, or at least enough water in the hollows to keep us alive. It might be the next day before we reached it, and the wounded and the badly mounted slaves must needs taste what was in store for them, yet the caravan and the warriors would be out of the dry lands.

Thus did the pasha, being guided by no devils. Sharm Beg swore that he must have a *talsmin* on his breast, that such luck should follow him; the *sipahis* said in whispers that he had summoned up the storm by that mad music. But I have often thought that the invisible hand upon the pasha's rein led him toward those hills, and to that which he found there.

WHAT need to tell of long hours of uncertainty? Upon the afternoon of the next day we found water. We had climbed into the foothills, where creepers grew over giant rocks, and a scum of sage covered the earth. The storm never reached us, but the clouds covered the mountains ahead of us, and muddy water flowed down the gully that we ascended.

Now the wind whistled and roared over us and chilled our veins. The air grew colder. We gave the horses a little water and went on, having relieved our thirst. In a single day the aspect of the land had changed. The dry lands lay far below us, like a great gray sea. Before sunset we climbed out upon a high plateau, where the earth was damp and the brushwood and tamarisk thick.

Ay, more than that. We soon saw pomegranate and slender apricot trees ranged in rows and cattle grazing on the slope above us.

"By ——," cried Sharm Beg. "There is a village."

It was only a little village—two-score wicker huts, a granary and cattle sheds. It lay under the sheer wall of a cliff, by a stream that rushed and roared down a depression in the cliff, over a series of little falls. But it was a village of hill men, and as pleasant in our eyes as a green oasis. Nay, it had a citadel and a master, as we soon saw.

Above the huts and the tilled land rose a mass of rock and rubble from the cliff, and on the summit of this outcropping a wall had been built. Within the wall stood a white building and from it reared a tower, almost touching—so it seemed—the dark granite of the cliff.

"We have never seen this place before," said the Kurds. "And its name we know not."

The rain had washed the dust from the air. It was then the hour of sun-sinking, and the sky above the hills shone with a fierce and ruddy light, so that we could see everything clearly—the spray rising from the waterfall, the white walls of the castle and the dozen horsemen who picked their way down the ramp of rock and cantered toward us.

Mirakhon Pasha with his officers and twenty *sipahis* moved to the head of our column and there halted, while every eye fastened upon the leader of the oncoming riders. His black charger moved with the grace of a racing breed, clean and slender of limb, well-groomed of coat.

The master of the black horse did not rein in when his followers halted, but cantered within spear's length of Mirakhon Pasha, whom he singled out instantly. Nor did he dismount to address the lord of Iran.

"O ye wayfarers," he cried. "What caravan is this?"

Farash Agha reined forward a little. "This is the caravan bearing the shah's gifts to Ind, under command of Mirakhon Pasha of Isfahan."

"The lord ambassador shall be my guest!"

The stranger instantly saluted Mirakhon Pasha, but with no bending of the head. He touched the hilt of his sword that he wore girdled high, and raised his right arm. I saw then that he was no more than a youth, perhaps the son of the master of the castle, perhaps the leader of the men-at-arms.

He sat at ease, in the plain, worn saddle of the big black. Yea, he carried himself well—a rare horseman, slight of limb and erect. His dark eyes gleamed with insolence or laughter or high spirits. Unlike the Iranis he wore only a single close wrapped tunic of white brocade and a small turban with a loose end falling upon his right shoulder. This head-cloth was bound in a strange way, by a slender fillet of crimson and gold.

"What place is this?" demanded Farash Agha, thrusting himself forward again.

Said I not the stranger could sit a horse? Evidently he did not choose to be addressed only by the officer, for his knees tightened and the black charger tossed his head and neighed, then reared suddenly with pawing hoofs. Farash Agha drew back swiftly from those hoofs, and when the youth of the castle had brought

down his horse nothing was between him and the pasha.

"Karadak," he responded good-humoredly, "the tower is Awa Bahadur Khan's.

"And thou?" demanded the Pasha.

"Thy host."

At these words something stirred in my memory. I looked over my shoulder at the salt plain, now tinted by the sunset; I looked up into the shadow of the cliff at the single tower and the lofty summits of the range behind it, and I recalled the words of the dead Sidri Singh. Here was the tower above the dry sea.

Mirakhon Pasha had come out of the desert, following no road, to the tower of Awa Khan, the Rajput, the kinsman of Radha.

"And thou art my guest," laughed the youth in the saddle of the black charger.

THERE is a time for speech, and a time for silence and thought. That first evening in Karadak I kept close to the young lord of the castle, saying nothing at all. I never doubted that this was the place Sidri Singh and Radha had been seeking when the old warrior fell ill, and the girl turned aside to take refuge in Bandar Abbasi.

These were surely Rajputs. The young lord showed us the armory of the castle with its gleaming tulwars ranged on the walls, its shields of buffalo hide, its horn bows in their leather cases and the stocks of reed and wooden arrows, with many old axes.

He himself carried a *khanda*, or curving blade, double-edged. He drew it at the Pasha's request, and showed it, for the master of the horse had a keen eye for weapons. But in this hour Mirakhon Pasha thought only of satisfying his hunger.

The caravan animals and most of the *sipahis* and all the Kurds, he had left to make camp beside the village, at the stream that descended from the waterfall. Into the castle he had brought his officers and intimates and servants with a few Red Hats. Twenty and four in all, as I counted.

Radha, likewise, he brought. She was led from the camel by the black slaves, who cast over her head a heavy shawl.

Hearing that this was the woman of the Pasha, the men of the castle went apart when she passed through the courtyard, and the young khan turned away his eyes courteously. Was she not forbidden to the eyes of strangers?

Though I strained my ears as she entered the gate and ascended the stairs I heard neither spoken word nor outcry. Once in her chamber upon the upper floor, guards were placed at the door, and from that moment no man of the castle could approach the door.

More rigid than the law of hospitality is the sanctity of the women of a guest. Save for the servants of Karadak, I did not think that any man would go up to the floor above us. Unless—

How was I to judge what would happen? Radha did not yet know where she was. The Rajputs had not so much as glanced at her. And as for the pasha, he did not know that Awa Khan was the kinsman of his captive.

Indeed, he thought only of enjoyment after his long ride. He announced, through Farash Agha, that he would be pleased to have the evening meal within an hour. The Rajput lord gave command that this should be done, and the servants hastened to and from the kitchen-house, preparing freshly slain fowls and stirring up the fires.

In a little more than the appointed time, the pasha was seated beside the master of Karadak in the hall of the castle with the Rajputs and guests ranged about the cloth on all sides—I sitting among the minstrels and the Red Hats and warriors of the garrison, in a place apart.

Truly, Awa Khan stinted not of his hospitality.

And the pasha plunged his fingers without ceasing into bowls of rice seasoned with saffron, plucked up whole roast pigeons, sweetened grapes and jellies. Then it entered his head to call for wine, and the young Rajput bade the servants bring honey-mead from the cellar. Farash

Agha and his officers soon drank this and shouted for more.

"After the journey," grunted the pasha, "we should feast well. Come, we are not priests. What are these?'

He pointed at two great kettle-drums finished in black wood and finely worked brass. They stood on a shelf midway down the hall—a strange place for *nakaras*, and indeed, these seemed too large to be carried on the saddle.

"*Elchi-gi*," responded an elder Rajput, scarred from brow to lip, "My lord ambassador, those were the gift of the Raja of Bikanir to my master, who, with his descendants for all time, hath the right of beating his drums when he approaches the gates of Bikanir."

The pasha, his broad shoulders gleaming green satin, the candlelight winking among the jewels of his turban crest, glanced at his youthful host who sat silent.

"Eh, thou hast honor, though thy years be few."

"I?" The slender warrior started, and smiled. "Nay, not I."

"He also, my lord," corrected the old Rajput called Byram by his companions. "He stood before Sidri Singh in the pass of Anavalli when the dead lay thick, and the clans of Bikanir advanced against the red banner of Chitore.

"That sword—"

"Peace, Byram Khan," cried the master of Karadak. "The talk was of the drums."

If the pasha remembered the name of Sidri Singh, he gave no sign. "Ay, the *nakaras*. Let my minstrels sound them."

"They are the *nakaras* of Karadak," the old Rajput retainer uttered swift protest, "only to be beaten when Awa Khan musters his men, or approaches the throne."

"Nay," laughed the pasha. "I would hear them."

The Rajputs exchanged glances and the young lord did not speak for a long moment.

"If it pleases thee," he said gravely, "my guest."

How was the pasha to know that these warriors out of Ind counted such matters as dearer than food, or life itself? He did not know that their ancestors had earned honors of a strange kind—a privilege or name bestowed for fierce valor in a bloodied field. Nay, they weighed each word as if it held honor or disgrace. Tradition ruled them, who counted their forebears back to unknown gods, and gave the title of *Raj* only to the utmost bravery. I did not know, until a later year. The pasha was their guest, and if he had asked even their weapons, they would have yielded to his whim.

So the musicians of Mirakhon Pasha made a tumult of reverberations out of the drums, and the mountebanks beside me sang, while the flutes whined and the pasha began to be amused. One of the Iranis rose and danced, and Farash Agha began to argue with Byram Khan concerning weapons.

"For the mounted man," he maintained, "the lance is best. *Vai*—the arrow flies wide of its mark and leaves a horseman open to a blow."

"Against the lance," said Byram Khan stoutly, "the sword will prevail, for the sword can ward as well as strike."

"Parry a lance?" Farash Agha laughed loud. "That is idle talk."

Byram Khan lifted his head and pulled at his gray mustache.

"Spears serve well enough to strike down boars or scatter camp followers."

Now Farash Agha and his *sipahis* all carried the tufted lances, while the men of Karadak had come forth to meet us, armed with shield and sword and bow. And the pasha frowned, ill-pleased.

"By the breath of Ali," he asked impatiently, "where is the man who will venture against a lance—with a sword alone?"

"Here," growled the one called Byram Khan, nodding at his master. "Without a shield, he has guarded himself against a spear and a galloping horse—ay, until the rider tired. Well do I know, for I was the rider."

"I speak not of blunted spears, nor the pastime of boys."

"Nor do I."

Eh, the elder Rajput spoke like an Arab of my folk—openly, fearlessly. Little was the lord of the Iranis accustomed to such words, he searching for guile or a veiled threat. For that is the way of the Irani speech, to cover guile with praise, and insult with courtesy. His broad chin thrust out and his dark eyes swept the faces that turned to him.

Then did Fizl Ali, one of his courtiers, mistake the meaning of his glance, and rise, hand on sword hilt.

"O ye men of Karadak, could ye have seen the weapon play of that night a week ago, when our lord, favored of Allah and ever-victorious, rode forth into the ranks of his foemen, spreading about him a carpet of the slain, ye would know as we know that in all Iran and Ind no man can cope with him, with lance or sword or javelin."

Thus he boasted and Byram's head lifted suddenly as he scented a challenge; but the young khan spoke before him.

"The greater honor, then, to Karadak, in the arrival of such a guest as the lord ambassador."

Fazl Ali seemed disappointed in this mild response. He fingered his close clipped beard and looked insolently about the hall.

"By the eyes of —— are there no men in Karadak? I see only prating grandfathers and senseless boys."

He meant to amuse the pasha by baiting the Rajputs, dealing with them as he was accustomed to do with the tribesmen and merchants of Iran. Yet it was true that we had seen in this castle many elders and youths—men like Byram Khan scarred and stiff-jointed, and past the prime of life. Yea, and youths armed with the light and almost straight blade that is half dagger, half sword.

And here was a strange thing. They were no more than the eleven that had come down to greet us, with four or five cup-bearers and servants. The village below had been peopled with no more than a score of peasants, and many women.

Yet the castle of Karadak could shelter easily the half of a hundred, and the stables in the courtyard were ample for a hundred steeds. At the time of our entrance I wondered if other men were holding themselves beyond sight. But there were no other warriors this side the dry lands. And Mirakhon Pasha, always watchful against unseen enemies, had brought with him into the castle two men for every Rajput.

Yea, and more. Two negro swordsmen guarded Radha in her chamber above us, and a *sipahi* lancer loitered at the gate, within hail of the camp, with its cavalry and Kurds.

At first, when I had heard the name of Awa Khan and seen the tower, I had hope of deliverance for the girl Radha and myself. Now I saw no hope—nay, I thought of stealing away when the pasha had finished making sport of the people of the castle. After the moon had set I could lift my camel from the line under the noses of the *sipahis*.

"True," laughed the young lord of Karadak. "Byram Khan is a grandfather many times, and I a fledgling."

He chose to ignore the taunt of Fazl Ali, but Farash Agha, sensing the mood of the pasha, hastened to add his word.

"Knowest not, little khan, that it is the custom to entertain Mirakhon Pasha with music. Where are thy minstrels?"

"Indeed, O my guest," growled Byram Khan. "We have no court minstrels. Yet Muhammad Dost and Kasim Khan are skilled after their fashion."

Two of the Rajput retainers came forward with strange instruments, slender horns of sandalwood and a thing of ebony and strings that sighed and whimpered under the touch of a bow. Eh, the note of the horns in the hands of Muhammad Dost bespoke sadness and grieving. This was no melody of feasting or the wooing of a maiden. It was the mourning of exiles, the sorrow of those oppressed by fate—yea, the slow cadence of riders at a foot-pace.

Mirakhon Pasha threw himself back on his cushions, frowning. And I, also, remembered the song, the same that

Radha the captive sang that night in the desert.

Perhaps it was the favorite melody of the Rajputs. I do not know. But presently a stir went through the listeners, and the musicians faltered on a note. Above our heads as it seemed, we heard the elfin echo of a distant voice. A woman's clear voice chiming in with the instruments.

Farash Agha had asked heedlessly for the musicians, and they had played of all things this song of the girl Radha. Had the *sipahi* held his peace, matters would have ended otherwise and that dawn of terror—but it was written thus.

The horns and the wailing strings began the second part of the song—yea, the onset of battle. And a shiver went through the Rajputs as I have seen Arabs quiver when they look to their swords at the shaking of the standard.* Clearer now the voice of Radha, singing in her chamber above, came to our ears. And the lord of Karadak sprang to his feet, silencing the musicians with a gesture.

Unseen, Radha carried on the song to its end, and the Rajput cried out suddenly.

"What voice is that?"

Reclining against his cushions, watching him with amused eyes, the pasha made answer.

"By Allah, that is the Rajputni, my bride." And he smiled at his host, stroking his chin with henna-stained fingers. "This is the night when she will be my bride, indeed."

The officers of the pasha whispered among themselves, taking pleasure in the amazement of the youth who had dared to act before them as the equal of their lord. They relished the jest, knowing that the khan of Karadak would not be suffered to question or approach the woman of the pasha. Was she not *kourrouk*—forbidden to the eye and the ear?

I wondered if the khan would ask her name, and whether the pasha would lie or not in answer. But he asked a different thing.

"Is she a hostage to the shah?"

The pasha smiled.

"Nay, she is mine—given to my hands by her father."

A single glance went from man to man of the retainers of Karadak. They sat without moving, and their khan said no more. He signed for the musicians to play something else and stepped back into the shadows behind the stands of candles. I saw that his face had become white as the brocade tunic that covered his slender body. Farash Agha laughed and reached for his cup.

In the stir and noise that followed, I rose and slipped from my corner of the hall. For the moment the *sipahis* had forgotten me, and I meant to see whether I could go unseen from the courtyard before they thought of me again. Twice before this I had meant to leave their caravan, and other happenings had prevented. Now I vowed that I would escape from Mirakhon Pasha. As for Radha, God alone could aid her. If the other Rajputs fought for her, it would put them in their shrouds.

So I thought. But who can choose the path he will follow? I passed through the dark chamber leading to the courtyard, through the open gate of the building.

Clear moonlight filled the courtyard, beyond the shadow of the castle. I could see the *sipahi*, leaning on his spear by the outer gate, and—the pasha had ordered it left open—beyond it the flat roofs of the village, the dark water of the stream and the tents of the caravan.

Then steel fingers gripped my shoulder, and a voice whispered—

"O *hakim*, dost thou hear—and understand?"

The words were in the Irani tongue, but the speaker was the khan of Karadak.

"I hear."

"Thou art the prisoner of the pasha?"

"Yea."

Though I felt no touch of steel and saw nothing, I did not move or draw away, for the voice of the youth was like the

* The shaking of the standards—a signal once used by the Arab clans to go forward and begin the battle.

whisper of a sword drawn from sheath.

"Who is the Rajputni maiden?"

"Radha, the daughter of Sidri Singh."

I had expected an exclamation or a curse, but the man behind me kept silence as if puzzled.

"Sidri Singh was at Kukri with all his followers—aye, he was in the field of war. How could his daughter be here without him?"

"They sought refuge in Karadak. *Insh'allah*, they wandered to my camp across the dry lands."

"The swan does not mate with the vulture. The sun might alter its course, or the stars die out, but Sidri Singh would never give child of his to yonder swine. That pasha lied, but thou, O *hakim*, will tell me the true story and swiftly."

In that instant I began to respect the young Rajput. And I dared ask a question.

"Hast thou other men near-by?"

"Nay. I bade thee tell me of Radha."

"Then think twice—ay, and thrice, before giving way to anger, my lord," I warned him. "Nay, harken to an old man, who has seen much slaying, and the death of the weak. These Iranis are wolves, and they will gut the castle and slash the blood hissing from thy people if thou oppose them."

"I will be judge of that. Speak."

So, having thought for a moment, I told him in brief words of the death of Sidri Singh and the man Subbul, and the carrying off of Radha. After all, this youth was her cousin, and it had been ordained that Mirakhon Pasha should come to this place.

MY BLOOD is old and thin. Yet in that moment it ran swift and warm, so that the scars of wounds in arm and breast and thigh—yea, I have known the tearing thrust of steel blade and the fiery smart of arrows—burned beneath the skin. I knew that swords would be bared in Karadak that night. How? How does the buffalo scent the water that lies in a gully beyond sight?

I did not hear the young Rajput leave my side. He did not go far, because I heard him whispering to a servant. Then, in a moment, my ears caught the heavier tread of an older man. Byram Khan growled words I did not understand. He departed, and once more the khan gave an order to the servant, who moved out into the moonlight of the courtyard.

"Art thou bound to serve the pasha?" So said the Rajput chieftain, standing close to me in the darkness.

"Nay."

"Good! Then go, old wanderer, from this gate and save thyself harm."

Now a moment before, I had desired nothing more than this. But in this moment curiosity and something more held me to my place. *W'allahi*—when did the men of the Nejd slink away like jackals from peril?

"I go in my own time," I said.

"Ho," he laughed under his breath. "The gray wolf smells out booty. An Arab will find loot."

"On my head be my deeds. Nay, I shared the bread and salt with Radha and Sidri Singh. I will watch the happenings of this night."

He seemed to muse awhile.

"By thy word, Arab, this pasha hath forfeited the immunity of a guest. Within the hour we shall know all the truth. And then—" He turned toward me swiftly. "Swear! Swear, thou, to seal thy lips with silence and to lift no weapon against man of mine this night."

"I swear, by the stone of Mecca!"

Indeed, I was ready to make this covenant. More and more my heart inclined toward the youth. He made decisions quickly, and I had not yet seen the man who dared oppose Mirakhon Pasha. This Rajput seemed utterly reckless. Could he plan wisely and hide his plans? I made test of him.

"Wilt accuse the pasha of an evil deed?"

"I?" Again he laughed, as if delight grew within him. "Another will do so."

"It would be better to fall upon him with thy followers."

"Is a hawk to be taken sleeping?"

While I pondered this, he turned from me suddenly and went toward the hall. I heard horses moving out from the stable, and saw they were two—the young Rajput's black charger and the dun mare of the pasha. A servant—the same who had spoken with my companion—led them, and the *sipahi* at the courtyard gate was full of angry questions, asking why in the name the pasha's horse had been saddled. Doubtless the khan had waited until he heard the horses before leaving my side.

Standing thus in the entrance hall between the feasters and the courtyard, I wondered what plan the Rajput had formed. The stair leading to Radha's chamber was behind me in the darkness, and it came into my mind that the young lord planned to go up with Byram Khan and strike suddenly upon the two negroes, slaying them and carrying off the maiden. So I would have done, in other years—had the girl been beautiful.

But the Iranis would be out of the hall at the first sound of struggle above them. Also, the khan would leave the greater part of his men to be slain. Still, he had saddled two horses—the best of the horses!

I thought that I, in his case, would fall sword in hand upon the feasters in the hall, trusting to surprize and swiftness to avail against numbers. Then I knew that this, also, was vain. How could the Rajputs, scattered among their guests, be warned of the plan? And what would prevent the warriors swarming up from the camp when they heard the tumult through the open gates of the castle? And, in the end, what of Radha, in the hands of the black slaves? I could think of no plan.

All this passed through my mind in the moment when the young khan walked to the heavy curtains of the banquet hall. With a sweep of his arms, he held them wide.

"Ho, where is the man who boasts of his lance?" he cried.

I could see the Iranis sit upright in astonishment. A gust of warm air, heavy with musk and mastic, swept past me. Mirakhon Pasha held a handful of grapes motionless under his lips.

"The sky is clear and the moon is high," said the young chieftain, smiling. "I have my horse saddled. Nay, we are weary of talk, and I would warm my blood before sleeping. Which is the best lancer among ye?"

By now the pasha's officers had found their voices.

"I!" cried Fazl Ali, springing up.

"By the ninety and nine holy names!' Farash Agha swore. "Dost name me boaster?"

"Art thou the one?" The young lord of Karadak spoke with disdain, scarcely veiled. "Come, my lord ambassador, wilt thou be judge of the joust?"

"What is this?" Mirakhon Pasha frowned.

"The play of Karadak, my lord. We have little skill at play of words or dancing, but it is our custom to mount and ride forth on such clear nights to exercise in arms. Yet thou art weary from the road. So this night we shall run a few courses in the courtyard."

The pasha noticed the change in the youth, the eagerness that he could not hide in his voice. It was clear to him, however, that the other Rajputs took such sport as a matter of course. They rose, making way for their guests. Then the broad face of the pasha grew dark, as I had seen it at Bandar Abbasi, and in the moment that Sidri Singh died. Like a wary boar, peering through the thicket, he scented the approach of something strange.

"O lord of my life," cried Farash Agha, thrusting Fazl Ali aside and salaaming low to his master. "Have I thy leave to clip the ears of this cub?"

"Look to thine own nose," cried one of the Rajputs.

Farash Agha glared about him, hand on sword-hilt. For the slicing of a nose there is only one reason, among the Iranis. Then, to mend his pride, he turned to the khan who had challenged him.

"I do not play with blunted lance points."

"Nor is there need, O Agha. Choose thou a lance, and I shall take the sword. If thou touch my garments, or draw blood, the victory is thine. If I parry the onset, taking no harm, I am winner of the joust."

The Iranis exchanged glances, being greatly amazed. They were in no mood to pass by a challenge, and even the pasha saw some rare sport before him. Warriors, minstrels and nobles passed from the hall, jostling and talking, some bearing with them the great silver candelabra and the Rajputs followed. Each man of Karadak paused where their young khan stood, and with each he spoke in his own speech. Then he hastened to the side of the pasha.

"Will it please thee to mount, my lord?"

Eh, he had thought to saddle the ambassador's mare, so that the pasha would not be constrained to remain afoot while others sat in the saddle. And he had also another reason that I suspected not at all.

The pasha mounted, Fazl Ali holding the stirrup. Once in the saddle, he took command of matters, placing the attendants with the candles close to him, and summoning the warrior who held his javelins. The Iranis ranged themselves about him, some sitting, others walking about, near the wall of the castle, at one side of the door. There was laughter and crying of wagers—for, in a joust of lance against sword and shield, wounds are freely given.

The pasha began to be restless and eager as he watched the master of Karadak mount the black charger and rein up and down the inclosure, displaying the paces of his steed. Even the Iranis murmured approval, for the khan sat as one rarely skilled, and the clean-limbed charger sidled and trotted and wheeled at touch of knee and bridle.

Soon the leader of the *sipahis* appeared on a Turkoman horse, trotting in and out among the spectators, eying the youth of Karadak. For the khan had no shield. Nor did he wear a cloak. His tight-fitting, white tunic made a good mark in the elusive light, mingled of the glow from the sky and the flickering gleam of the candles.

The pasha looked at his sentry in the open gate, and past him to the tents and dying fires of the caravan. The watchers fell silent, drawing closer to the wall, the Rajputs mingling with the Iranis.

"Begin!" he cried, leaning on the saddle horn.

The two riders cantered to the far ends of the courtyard, some sixty paces apart. Farash Agha raised his lance tip, and the Rajput drew his saber, saluting. Then the brown horse of the Irani trotted forward, and cantered, while the black charger, tight-reined, trotted, half rearing.

In an instant they were together, hoofs ringing on the hard clay of the inclosure. And those near me shouted loud. Farash Agha gripping his lance in his right hand, pressing the shaft against his forearm, had thrust savagely at the young khan's girdle. Truly, he did not mean to play with blunt weapons!

The khan's sword flashed out, clinking against the wood of the lance, and the long shining point of the spear was turned aside, sweeping past him harmlessly.

"*Shabash!*" growled Fazl Ali. "Well done."

But the pasha and most of the Iranis looked disappointed. They hoped to see the Rajput cast, bleeding, from the saddle.

Again the riders turned and faced each other and Farash Agha spurred forward with a tight rein. This time his point wavered and thrust swiftly at the throat of the youth. Eh, the khan, leaning forward, parried upward. Again, the lance point slid off his blade without harm.

The Rajputs watched him with pride, breathing quickly. And when the riders turned for the third course, the pasha and his Iranis thought of nothing but the rearing horses, the gleaming weapons. This time Farash Agha tried another trick.

Leaning far forward, he gripped the spearshaft under his armpit and sat tight in the saddle, trusting by weight and

strength to bear through the parrying stroke of the sword.

The young khan saw and acted upon the instant. The black charger darted forward, the rider slipped to the far side of the saddle. The blade of the heavy *khanda*, held high, smashed down upon the spear, driving the lance point sharply down, into the earth.

Before Farash Agha could recover, the point had caught and held. Perforce he loosed his hold on the spear which remained, upright and quivering, in the center of the courtyard. *W'allahi*, it happened as I have said—the lancer was disarmed.

And before any one could cry out, the master of Karadak wheeled his charger around to face the pasha.

"The play is ended," he cried.

He had seen from the corner of his eye what we now saw. From the door of the castle, out of the darkened entrance, stepped Radha.

Clearly was she to be seen, by the candles. Her hair, unbound, fell thick upon her shoulders, and her veil had vanished. Swaying, she stood in the half light, a dagger gripped tight against her slender breast.

For the time it takes to draw and loose a breath there was silence, while her eyes, shadowed by grieving, sought swiftly among the men. Her lips parted and she raised her head. Against the dark entrance she looked like a child out of *peristan*—an elf of spirit-land. But behind her loomed Byram Khan, his bared sword dripping blood from the channels, and his eyes afire.

"O my kinsmen!" she cried in a clear voice. "Avenge Sidri Singh. I shall live if ye live, or die with ye!"

Her eyes sought the pasha, and Byram Khan strode past her, shouting.

"The proof! To your swords, my children."

HEARING these words I thought that the Rajputs, all eleven of them, had dug their graves. True, the young khan might have ridden past the sentry at the gate. But, penned thus between the sheer cliff behind the castle and the high wall around the courtyard, how could the others flee? Penned in with the pasha and his wolves!

"God is one," I said to myself. "It will be over in a little time."

For the *sipahis* were no merchant-folk or peasantry to be charged and scattered. Full armed, alert and angered, they grasped at sword-hilt and ax-shaft and Mirakhon Pasha reached back his right hand swiftly. The attendant behind him thrust a javelin into his fingers.

Without an instant's hesitation—without gathering up his reins or stiffening his seat in the saddle—the pasha launched his weapon, his heavy body swinging forward, grunting with the effort. He struck thus, as a panther leaps, with the release of mighty muscles, swift as instinct. Clear in the candlelight I saw him cast at his mark, the young khan wheeling toward him ten paces distant.

No rider could dodge a javelin so thrown at such a little distance. Indeed, I did not see the shaft fly. But I saw it strike—against the far wall of the courtyard.

Mirakhon Pasha had missed his cast. Perhaps the flickering candles beside him had drawn his eye from the slim white figure wavering in the moonlight; perhaps anger had clouded his sight. I do not know.

But when the javelin shattered itself against the bricks of the wall, the pasha cried out as if in pain. The young Rajput, the two-edged sword swinging at his knee, spurred at him. The pasha also drove home his spurs, wrenching out his scimitar as the dun mare plunged.

The Rajput came in like flame out of darkness, laughing, leaning in toward his foe. The broad body of the pasha stiffened. The swords clashed once.

I saw it—the shining blade of the Rajput beat aside the lighter scimitar and seemed to stroke the pasha's breast in passing.

The pasha rose in his stirrups and cried out twice. Then the dun mare, rearing in

frantic excitement, cast him from the saddle and he lay prone on his face, as a heavy sack, cast from a height, remains motionless.

"Guard thy lord!" shouted Farash Agha who had seen from the center of the courtyard the fall of his master.

"Ho, my Agha!" cried the Rajput chieftain. "Where now is thy lance?"

He had recovered, reined back the black charger scattering dust and gravel, and wheeled toward the officer of the *sipahis*. I did not see their meeting. Steel clanged all about me, and the shouts of the Red Hats mingled with the battle cry of the men of Karadak. The dun mare, riderless, swerved within reach of my hand.

It was no place to remain afoot. Nay, an aged and feeble man would not long have survived in that place of death. I grasped the mare's rein, steadied her, and climbed into the saddle. In other years I would have leaped without touching horn or stirrup. I drew my sword, because in a mad fight such as this within walls, a gray beard is no shield, and every soul must guard himself.

I looked at the leaders. *W'allahi*, they were slashing like fiends—Farash Agha with his brow and cheek laid open, the Rajput scattering blood when he swung his right arm. The horses were turning swiftly on their haunches, and the grinding of the steel blades did not cease. A *sipahi*, his lance poised, stood beside them.

"*Allah!*" shrieked Farash Agha.

The Rajput's two-edged *khanda* passed into his body under the heart—yea, the half of the blade. And that moment, seeing his chance, the Irani warrior on foot thrust his spear into the Rajput's back.

How could I sit, mounted and idle, and watch a boy struck down in this manner? I kneed the mare forward and slashed at the *sipahi's* neck above the mail. The edge of my scimitar ground against bone and I had to pull to clear it. The *sipahi* fell where he stood. It was not a bad blow.

Farash Agha slid from his saddle, but the young khan kept his seat and called out to me above the tumult.

"I have seen, O Arab. Ask thy reward in another day."

He was able to walk his horse toward the castle door where Radha stood by the candles, her faces bloodless in its cloud of dark hair. But he was too badly hurt to do more than cry encouragement to his men. I glanced about the courtyard. Never had I seen such play of weapons.

The Rajputs, without shield or mail, cast themselves upon their foes with nothing but the sword. Death struck them and laid them low in an instant, or the *sipahis* fell under their feet. The youths and old men of Karadak acted as if reckless of life. Indeed, they had but one thought—to spread swiftly the carpet of the slain before other enemies could come up from the camp.

And they bore themselves with the skill of warriors reared to weapons. By swift sword-play they slashed through the guard of saber and shield, and leaped forward. And, lo, the fight was now an equal thing. The fury of the Rajputs matched well the sullen anger of the *sipahis*. But I knew that if the young hero of Karadak had not overthrown the pasha and Farash Agha in as many minutes, the Rajputs would have been doomed before now.

Leaderless, the *sipahis* began to think of themselves, to gather in groups. The sentry, who all this time had remained amazed and motionless, so sudden had been the onset, instead of running in, began to beat on his shield and shout in a high voice to the watchers in the camp below.

"*Hai-hai!* Aid, Kasim ad-Din! Ho, Sharm Beg! Aid—give aid!"

Who can tell the happenings of a hand-to-hand affray? Nay, the man who tells much lies greatly! I saw one of the mountebanks still hugging his guitar, dancing in fear from the swords; I heard a boy shriek for his father—and a man staggering along the wall, curse the name of God. The candles had gone out, and a haze of dust rose against the moonlight.

I rode down one warrior, who tried to guard himself with his shield as if the rush of a horse were the flight of an arrow; I followed another horseman through the murk, rose in my stirrups to slash at his head, and saw that it was Byram Khan who had got himself a horse in some fashion known only to God.

A face peered up at me out of darkness, and I thought it was one of the Irani nobles. He was laughing—

"Ho—aho—ho!" Thus, on his knees, both hands clutched in his girdle, he was laughing, and it sounded strangely.

Two of the pasha's minstrels, with flying mantles, elbowed and jostled to be first out of the gate, though five horsemen abreast could have passed through without touching stirrup. I thought then that the half-dozen creatures of the pasha would not stand and fight like the *sipahis*. Then I could see nothing at all for the dust, and drew rein.

A voice behind me called out—

"Close the gate!"

The two, who hurried forward and swung shut the wide portals of teakwood and iron, were men of Karadak, servants who had taken no part in the affray. They turned the massive iron key in the lock and lugged the lance-long bars into place. And the one who had given the order walked up to see that all had been well done. It was Byram Khan.

The fighting had ended. When the dust settled down I looked about the courtyard. Three other Rajputs were on their feet, and none beside the three.

TRULY the Rajput swordsmen had spread that night the carpet of the slain.

Nine *sipahis* and Irani nobles were already dead or soon to await their shrouds. Four, slashed and pierced in the bodies and heads, cursed and moaned for water. Four defenders of Karadak lay lifeless, and three little better. All the pasha's mountebanks and the remaining three of his men must have fled through the gate. Well for us, that gate had been open! Cornered men will fight with fury.

Indeed, the desperation of the Rajputs, who had been resolved to prevail or perish together, had turned the tide of victory toward them.

Byram Khan peered at me, his eyes clouded and his breath coming in long gasps.

"Ho, Arab!" He gripped my arm. "How many swords will come against us from the camp below?"

I counted over in my mind the number of the caravan folk.

"Two hundred—nay, two hundred and twenty and eight, and perhaps they who escaped from here."

"What manner of men?"

"*Sipahis* and Kurdish cavalry."

Byram Khan looked at his three Rajputs, and at the long stretch of the courtyard wall. He looked at me and said, "God is one!" and walked away. His meaning was that what might happen hereafter would be in the hands of God, not in his.

I dismounted and went to the form of the pasha, thinking that if life remained in him we might hold him as a hostage against attack. Gripping his shoulder I turned him over, with an effort, for he was heavy. His pallid face was smirched with dirt; his lips, drawn back from his teeth, seemed bloodless, and his body below the ribs had been cut through to the backbone. His eyes stared unwinking into the moonlit sky.

Farash Agha I did not look at, knowing well his case; but Fazl Ali lay among the wounded and cursed me.

"The sword prevailed," he grinned. "But ye will never see the dawn."

From him I went to look at the wound of the Rajput chieftain. He sat upon a tiger skin, Radha kneeling and supporting his head. She held a turban cloth tight against his back under the shoulder-blade where the lance point had bitten. They were talking low-voiced, for he could do little more than whisper. What they said I know not, yet she seemed to be sorrowing and he heartening her.

"My lord," I broke in upon them.

"Bid thy men carry thee to a couch and I will probe the wound."

"O *hakim*," he responded. "Until the issue is at an end I will not leave the courtyard, and thou art too precious a swordsman to be taken from the wall. Get thee to Byram Khan."

Nevertheless, he called me back and bade me do what I could for the other wounded while we waited, and this I made shift to do while the shadow of the castle crept across the courtyard as the moon sank behind the hills and a throng of warriors came up with torches from the camp.

This might have been the ninth hour of the night. Well for us that the wall was in shadow! Byram Khan ordered his three followers and four servants to move about and rattle shield and arrow case. The pasha's men halted beyond arrow shot and argued among themselves. Kasim ad-Din, the pock-marked chieftain of the Kurds, and Sharm Beg did most of the talking.

First they demanded the surrender of the castle, bidding us throw our arms over the wall.

"Come ye and make proof of our weapons!" responded the old Rajput.

When it was clear to them that the castle would not be yielded, there was more talk among them. Perhaps they suspected Radha of casting a spell upon their dead lord, for the wild Kurds are fearful of such things; or the few who escaped told them lies about our numbers, to justify themselves.

"Is Mirakhon Pasha truly dead?" they asked.

"As Farash Agha is," Byram Khan assured them.

Then they withdrew a little and sat down to consult among themselves. When the torches went out, they began to drift back to their camp. This seemed a trick and we watched until the dawn spread in our faces, revealing the tents and the groups of warriors among them. The villagers, fearful of the battle in the morning, had fled during the night, driving off most of their animals. The Kurds and *sipahis* had other things to think about.

Byram Khan said they would make the attack now when they could see what little was before them. But I began to meditate. The sun was spear high, and smoke rose from the fires of the camp. Nay, that day passed, without so much as an arrow shot against the wall. And I felt assured of what would happen.

The men of the caravan never attacked the castle.

Perhaps the *sipahis* would have done so, to avenge Farash Agha and gut the castle. But there was the treasure in the camel bales—the forty loads of gifts for the emperor of Ind, worth many times the looting of a small hill tower such as this. The *sipahis* did not attack because they were afriad to leave the Kurds in charge of this treasure and very likely afraid that if they were cut up by our weapons, the Kurds would fall upon them.

With such unexpected riches under their hands, and with Mirakhon Pasha gone from them, the Kurds thought of nothing but those bales.

Yea, in the end they all went away together, after supplying themselves with water and grain and meat. They went down to seek the road from which Mirakhon Pasha had led them. I have often wondered what befell thereafter in the desert, and what finally became of the treasure bales.

Those bales never reached the emperor. Yet a little of the treasure did go to Ind. In the next year, by the river road of Lahore, I saw some of it. A wealthy tribesman rode past, his saddle cloth silk of Cathy sewn with pearls, his scimitar blazing with sapphires and silverwork. Behind him came five camels bearing women, hidden from sight by rich carpets. Thus I saw Sharm Beg again.

ON THE third day I took my leave of the Rajputs, having seen that it was not ordained that young lord should die. The spear had pierced upward under the shoulder-blade and no arteries were severed. Indeed, he had upon his body the scars of five other wounds, each as

bad as this. Though I had bidden him keep to his bed for the rest of that moon. I found him outstretched upon a mattress, clad in a fresh white tunic of brocade, his small turban wound with a string of pearls. And four men-servants of Karadak were bearing the mattress and the wounded youth toward the river garden where Radha sat.

"Nay," he smiled at my protest. "Thou hast said it was ordained that I should live. Who would deny his eyes the sight of such beauty in a maiden?"

Indeed, though veiled, Radha's face held the pride and gladness of one released from torment. She rose to greet the hero when his mattress was laid at her feet.

"From my lips, my lord," she said in the Irani speech. "Thou must accept the gratitude of Kukri."

"For a word from thee, I would have passed through the swords of Kukri," he responded.

In another man this would have sounded like boasting, but this youth was full of unexpected happenings. Surely, for cousins, they made much of ceremony. But I did not yet know the ways of the Rajputs. Radha, wrapped in her white garments of mourning, sat quiet in the ferns by the bank of the stream—ay, like a lily rising from the ferns, so straight was she, so slender and fair to behold. The eyes of the young lord took fire.

Thirty yeras ago, I would not have left Karadak thus—not without measuring my sword against his, and taking the maiden upon my saddle, if I lived. Thirty years!

"Grant me," I asked of him, "thy leave to depart."

"Not without a gift," cried Radha swiftly. "*He* will give thee, O *shaikh* that which thou desirest in Karadak."

"Nay," I denied. "I have beheld the beauty of Radha of Kukri, and what gift is to be measured against that sight?"

"Well said!" cried the Rajput. "But thou hast lost a camel in this fighting, Daril." He turned and spoke to one of the servants who bowed and made off toward the castle. "Byram Khan will choose for thee a good horse, saddled and equipped." Suddenly he smiled merrily. "Thou art a strange physician, not to claim a reward. But I say thou art a better swordsman than physician, and wilt ever be!"

Thus he gave me leave to go. At the stables I met Byram Khan, mounted, with one follower also in the saddle. Presently a groom let out my mount, and lo—it was the dun mare of the dead pasha!

"Awa Khan hath a generous hand!" I cried.

Byram Khan gathered up his reins and rode forward, musing.

"That is true," he growled, "as I, the captain of his swordsmen know well. But this mare is the gift of the guest of Karadak."

I thought of one person and then another.

"The Rajput maiden, then?"

"By her wish, ay, but she had naught to give."

"Then it was surely Awa Khan."

The old warrior shook his head, and let his charger trot through the village street, saying that he had orders to escort me forth upon a trail that led north to the caravan route to Ind.

"Awa Khan is not here," he said, "being in the army of his lord the Raja of Bikanir with seventy men from Karadak. He left me here to keep the castle with nine men."

Then I remembered that the young Rajput, the rider of the black charger—he who had overthrown Mirakhon Pasha—had never spoken his name. I had thought that he was the kinsman of Radha.

"Who is the swordsman?" I asked.

Byram Khan looked at me in surprize.

"Ask in Chitore—ay, or Ind. He is Kurran, a stripling of the royal house of Chitore, son of the ruler of Rajasthan. He is too young to be sagacious, but he can handle a sword."

"Then he is no kinsman of Radha of Kukri?"

The old retainer of Awa Khan passed

his fingers through his beard and grunted.

"Nay, Chitore and Bikanir have been at war for long years. They are still at war. Once, in the gorge of Anavalli this youth Kurran and Sidri Singh fought hand to hand."

I thought then of the feuds of my clans in the Nejd. It was clear to me now that Awa Khan and Sidri Singh had been opposed to Kurran's clan in this feud of the Rajputs.

"Yet Kurran was the guest of Karadak," I said.

"Ay, he was riding from the mountains of Iran, with two followers, to join his father's army. He turned aside to rest at Karadak. Was the hospitality of Awa Khan to be denied the noblest blood of Ind? Being Kurran, we served him, and when this pasha came, though a dog-born dog, it was the duty of Kurran to offer hospitality."

*W'allahi*, they knew the duty of the salt, these Raputs! Desert men, like the chieftains of my *sahra*. Within the tents, the feud is forgotten.

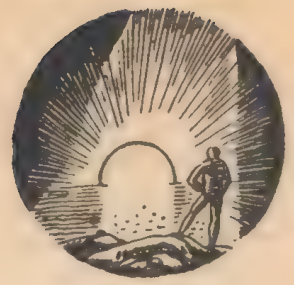
"Though no kinsman of Radha, this stripling prince drew the sword for her," I mused aloud.

"If he had not done so," Byram Khan said grimly, "the honor of Awa Khan would have been lost indeed. Being the guest of Karadak, Kurran took thought for the honor of Awa Khan." He meditated a moment, easing forward in the saddle. "And Awa Khan will be well satisfied when I tell him what was done, and how."

Thus we parted, he turning back to Karadak, I trotting forward along the mountain trail. I wondered whether Kurran would ride forth on this road with a bride. Byram Khan had not bothered his head about this. Indeed, it was hard to say what that young Kurran would not do. Thirty years—yea, and eight—I had carried such a maiden off in spite of the watching of her clan.

But one thing was certain. When I looked down at the smooth mane and the twitching ears of the fine mare, I thought of Mirakhon Pasha. Surely he had dug his own grave, being blinded by pride and lust.

# The Camp-Fire



*A free-to-all* Meeting-Place *for* Readers, Writers *and* Adventurers

**BLOW-GUNS in North America. Further information on a point queried in "Ask Adventure". Has anyone else had any experience with these interesting weapons?**

In your December number, in the "Ask Adventure" section you have an interesting answer on North American blow-guns. It might interest you to know that it is, wherever found, a deep forest weapon; used by people who could not afford to shoot and lose the more costly arrows of the long bow, and in cover so dense that the bow would prove clumsy. I am not so sure that the darts were not poisoned in North America; without poison they are available for the small game only, and numbers of arrowheads found in the ancient range of the Muskohegan, Iroquoian, Yuchi, and Tamuguan tribes are so small they could not have been used on an arrow thrown by a bow, unless a toy; and for killing small game they were not needed; but, if coated with poison, and carried by a dart into the flesh of even a deer, might kill quickly. A friend once found a cache of ten or twelve of these small flints, in the Cherokee hills of Tennessee, no one of which was larger than his little finger nail. The advent of iron and gunpowder wrought such a revolution in the culture of our Indians that we can not be certain about their weapons before Columbus came.

The Sionan people formerly dwelt east of the Mississippi and probably used the blow-gun in the dense forests there; but when they moved out on the open plains they used the bow and arrows, as the latter could usually be recovered and the bow could be used even on horseback, a thing impossible for the blow-gun.

I hope some one else will stir Mr. Woodward up soon.—LUCIEN BECKNER.

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**THIS is by no means his first story in the magazine, but Norman Springer rises to introduce himself just the same. You'll observe that he has reason to be well acquainted with the background of his complete novelette in this issue.**

Most of my stories have been sea stories. I know ships and seamen pretty thoroughly, having been interested in them all my life, and having followed the sea for a living, in both sail and steam, for nearly eight years. In making my stories I always strengthened my own memory and experience by reading everything I can lay hold of about the particular place or subject or era.

I was born in Ontario, Canada, in 1887. My home has been in or about San Francisco since 1896—whenever I have been at home. Skipped away to sea when I was sixteen, shipping offshore in an ancient square-rigger. I made two deepwater voyages in square rigged sailing vessels, the first from San Francisco to Australia, the second from Australia to the West Coast of South America and return; afterwards I served for a couple of months on a small ketch on the West Australian coast, and spent several more months rambling about the back blocks of that frontier country "on the wallaby," as they say out there, which means hoboing it.

I graduated from sail into steam after a spell on the beach in Sydney, by joining a British tramp steamer. Next ship was an American army transport which landed me back in the U. S. A., though several thousand miles from home. It was cold. So I joined the Navy, and spent the next four years as fireman and oiler in the Atlantic Fleet. My ship was the U. S. S. *Minnesota*, and she was one of the sixteen battleships that made the cruise around the world in 1907-08, when I was in her.

When I was discharged from the Navy I nearly became a rich oil man. That is, I got a job in Philadelphia to work for an oil company in Bakersfield, Calif.; a job with bright prospects, the man said. I hotfooted it to Bakersfield, and discovered the oil company had become bankrupt while I was en route. It was a shock. I quit the oil business in disgust, and went down to Los Angeles and became a sort of roustabout mechanic and pipefitter in power plants and on construction jobs.

At this time I was smitten with ambition—to get away from this hand graft. I was sick of overalls

and wrenches; I wanted a nice, soft white collar job. So I gradually—oh, very gradually—became an author. And ever since I've been remembering what a carefree, easy-going life it was on the pile-driver.

Education—widely, but not very wisely read; that labels me, I fear. Of formal schooling I had very little. I went through grammer school—nearly, and then I went to work. What I know I obtained from books and people.

Have several recreations to which I am devoted: attending Holy Roller revivals, visiting auto camps, and fishing. Especially fishing. And I'm a rotten fisherman.—NORMAN SPRINGER.

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A LETTER from Harry G. Huse to tell of the origin of his Indian story in this issue.

"Good Medicine" grew partly out of my investigation of Indian burial customs and partly, I believe, from something I saw last summer on the Blackfoot Reservation—the crotched center pole of a medicine lodge with its bundle of fagots like an overgrown eagle's nest against the background of a modern grain elevator. The contrast struck me quite forcibly. The Blackfoot Sun Dance for which a new medicine lodge is constructed each year is a delightful pagan ceremony the significance of which few white natives take the trouble to understand. I thought of the way one culture almost inevitably clashes with another—and later, after I had been reading more of Blackfoot customs the idea of such a clash as that which I used in "Good Medicine" came to me.

The story has no foundation of fact—that is none of the incidents I used every really happened. But they might very well have, I believe. Montana has not escaped the spirit of progress although her unregenerate past is comparatively recent.

I shall be in the Spindletop oil field during the early part of the winter and later in the "Cajan" country in Louisiana. I hope I shall be able to send you some stories you will like from there—HARRY G. HUSE.

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I CAN'T resist printing this letter which one of you wrote to S. B. H. Hurst of our writers' brigade, if for no other reason than that, as Mr. Hurst says, "it shows that our readers are generally good sports."

In April of this year I wrote to *Adventure* criticizing one of your stories regarding centipedes. I have since discovered that I was at fault, and not you. Now I'm not an amateur naturalist, merely an observer, I have traveled extensively in my youth in the Tropics and have seen centipedes up to 10 inches but never over. But since writing to Mr. Clarke I have looked up books on Entomology, and find that they grow much larger. So please, Mr. Hurst, accept my humble apologies. I do not claim to know it all. Indeed I know very little, and am not ashamed of it. I had no intention of calling you a liar, I was rather hasty. Also I have since spoken to an A. A. man, An Ex-Tropical Tramp! and he verified your statements. So you see I admit I was at fault.—"It again shows that our readers are generally good sports."—S. B. H. HURST.

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HAROLD LAMB tells about tradition among the Arabs, in connection with his long novelette in this issue.

A word about Arab tradition. It is like no other tradition because the spoken word was handed down from generation to generation rather than the written. Until the ninth or tenth centuries very few Arabs could write, and it was customary when two riders met on the trail to stop and exchange anecdotes. "So-and-so says, on the authority of Such-an-one—"

Naturally when the first annals came to be written they were merely a collection of *hadith*—tradition. So we find the early Arab histories to be brief and matter-of-fact, almost invariably truthful. They deal with men and deeds, weapons and the amount of spoil taken in the razzias—with covenants and herds and the position of wells. And especially with the manner in which the great warriors of the hosts met their deaths.

These fragmentary histories were jotted down on "date leaves, bits of leather, shoulder blades, stony tablets, or the hearts of men." But, put into words by men born and bred to war, who spent most of their lives in the saddle, the written *hadith* have a real ring to them. Here we find no lengthy memoirs, no monastery-compiled chronicles, or histories written long after events. We have the word-of-mouth narrative of men who were on the scene.

That is, perhaps, why the medieval histories of al Tabari and ibn Khaldun are better reading than anything that came out of Europe in those days. The Arab then had a fine sense of chivalry, a keen wit, any amount of pride in himself and his deeds and a full appreciation of what was due him, and others—in the way of money, but more particularly, of honor.

As an example, take an incident in a famous battle—Cadesiya, when the small host of invading Arabs was confronted by the great mass of Persians under Rustam, in the year 635—as related by al Baladhuri and Mas'udi.

(To explain the situation, Sa'd, the Lion, leader of the Arabs, was sick that day and was watching events from a cot placed on the rampart of a tower. So his horse, a white mare, was without a rider. Every able bodied man was in the lines, and the women had been put in charge of the wounded and the prisoners. Among those confined was Abu Mihjan, a hot headed but redoubtable warrior who

had not long since charged single-handed against an elephant—the first to be encountered by the Arabs.)

"Abu Mihjan was sent away to Badi by Omar (the Caliph), because he drank wine. Somehow, he managed to escape and rode after Sa'd. In the army of Sa'd, Abu Mihjan again drank wine and Sa'd flogged and imprisoned him in the tower. There he was heard to sing:

> 'Bury me by the roots of the vine,
> The moisture will wet my bones;
> Bury me not in the open plain,
> Lacking the fragrant grape.'

"When he heard the shouting of the battle he asked Zabra a concubine of Sa'd to set him free to take part in the fight, after which he would return to his fetters. She made him swear by Allah he would do so. Mounted on S'd's mare he rode against the Persians, piercing through their line several times, and once cutting with his sword into the trunk of an elephant. Many did not know who he was, and others thought him to be Al Khizr (one of the angels).

"But Sa'd said, 'If Abu Mihjan were not safe in chains I could swear it were he and the mare my own.' Abu Mihjan afterward rode back to his gaol, and Sa'd exclaimed, 'The mare is indeed mine, but the charge is that of Abu Mihjan!'

"When the issue with Rustam (the battle with the Persians) was ended, Sa'd said to Abu Mihjan, 'By Allah, I shall never punish thee for wine drinking after seeing what I saw of thee.'

" 'As for me,' Abu Mihjan answered, 'by Allah, I shall never drink it again.' "

I HAVE tried to tell the story of the Guest of Karadak as Daril would have told it, relating it in his own way as *haidth*—tradition.

The hospitality and the fighting qualities of the Rajputs are too well known to need comment. They would, as one chronicler put it, "find cause for quarrel in the blowing of the wind against their faces." The feud between Kurran's clan and the clan of the cousins, Awa Khan and Sidri Singh was only one of fifty—or a hundred—going on at the time. Perhaps its first cause had been no more than an unintended word, or a fancied grievance. Nothing would appeal more to a Rajput chieftain than an opportunity to defend the honor—against a stranger—of another Rajput with whom he was at feud.

In one case a raja, flying for his life from the pursuit of his enemies, stopped for a night at the dwelling of a third chieftain who was not involved in their quarrel. This Rajput considered that the fugitive was now his guest and he was obligated to protect him, so he defended his house against the pursuers and lost his life in so doing.—HAROLD LAMB.

THIS letter about present day whales comes from way down deep in the Camp-Fire cache, but that doesn't make it any the less interesting.

American Canal employees on their way from the U. S. to the Zone occasionally see a whale, tho I have never heard them tell of seeing a "school" of them. A couple of years ago a whale swam in from the Caribbean thru the gap between the breakwaters protecting the Atlantic entrance to the Canal and grounded in shallow waters to the east of the Canal prism, about a quarter of a mile to the south of the Cristobal Coaling Plant. It was unable to extricate itself and remained there, with the top of its head and most of its back showing above water. A group of Canal employees undertook to salvage it. They killed it by machine-gun fire directed from a launch and towed it with a tug to Pier 6, with the idea of lifting it onto flat cars and hauling it to the abattoir at Mt. Hope for rendering. A 75-ton locomotive crane was unable to lift the whale from the water, and after continued efforts the salvage was abandoned, as the animal was not a sperm whale and was decomposing. The tug *Porto Bello* tugged the whale into deep water about 12 miles beyond the breakwaters and the carcass was bombed by a Navy aeroplane. Two 160-pound bombs were dropped from a height of 1000 feet. The first struck the tail and tore a large hole in the carcass, and the second fell opposite the head, about 15 feet to one side. The monster aroused a great deal of interest among residents of the Isthmus. Hundreds of people went out in launches and cayucas to see it while alive, and other hundreds went to see it along Pier 6. Exact measurements were not taken, but the whale was estimated to be approximately 120 feet in length and to weigh 125 tons. It was a female, of the kind known as flat humpback and was considered by men of whaling experience to have been unusually large.

On October 22nd, 1924, 2 whaling vessels transited the Canal, bound for Salina Cruz, Mexico. Since that date, 7 others have followed, making 9 vessels in all, bound for the region between Salina Cruz and Magdalena Bay. All these vessels fly the Norwegian flag and show as their home port Sandefjord, Norway. The 7 smaller vessels range from 24 to 49 tons, about the size of the smaller vessels used by Christopher Columbus on his first voyage to America, the 2 larger being of 1,410 and 4,816 tons, respectively. All of the vessels were in ballast, except the largest, which carried 5,054 tons of coal from Cardiff, destined to Magdalena Bay.

From the above it may be seen that the pleasant and profitable business of whaling is not yet a thing of the past.—R. S. CARTER.

# ASK *Adventure*

For *free information* and *services* you can't get elsewhere

## Sourdough

THE "SOURINGS" are not faint perfume, by any means; but for this purpose the fermented dough is better and more savory the older it is.

*Request:*—"I would like a recipe for sourdough bread, if you would be so kind."—MARTIN T. PFLUEGER, Fort Sherman, C. Z.

*Reply,* by Mr. Horace Kephart:—Sourdough bread is more wholesome for steady diet than bread or biscuits made with soda or baking powder in the usual way. It is made with fermented dough as a substitute for yeast.

Stir two cups of flour, two tablespoons of sugar and one tablespoon of salt in enough water to make a creamy batter. Then stir in a tablespoon of vinegar. Set the batter in the sun or near the fire, with cheesecloth or netting over it to keep out insects, and leave it for 36 to 48 hours to sour. The "sourings" smell pretty loud, but never mind, for this fermented dough gets better and better, for leavening purposes, the older it is.

To make bread: Thicken some of the sourings with enough flour to make a stiff dough, knead thoroughly, work into small loaves, place them near the fire to rise and then bake.

To make pancakes: Mix a batter of flour and water, stir into it some sourings, and let it rise overnight. In the morning stir into the batter two tablespoons of molasses, one teaspoon of salt and one-half teaspoon of soda, for each *two* persons. Bake over a quick hot fire.

Keep some of the sourings for future use. If traveling, keep in a push-top tin, leaving plenty of room for expansion. Uneaten pancakes should be broken up and added to the sourings. You can keep the sourings going continuously for months. If it loses strength, add a tablespoon of vinegar.

When you have nothing but flour and salt, and you are tired of unleavened bread, make salt-rising bread. For a baking of two or three loaves take about a pint of moderately warm water (a pleasant heat to the hand) and stir into it as much flour as will make a good batter, not too thick. Add to this one-half teaspoonful of salt. Set the vessel in a pan of moderatey warm water, near a fire or in the sunlight. The water must not be allowed to cool much below the original heat, more warm water being added to the pan as required.

In six to eight hours the whole will be in active fermentation. Then work into it enough flour and warm water to make a stiff dough. Knead this until it is tough and does not stick to the board. Make into loaves and keep them warmly covered, near the fire, till they rise. They must be baked as soon as this second rising takes place.

## Travel Films

A RATHER new field of photography, and one that seems to offer interesting marketing possibilities.

*Request:*—"In the near future I intend to go on a prospecting trip in Honduras, Central America and I would like to take some movie camera along.

Will you please answer the following questions:

1. Could I use a De Vry Standard Automatic movie camera with F. 35 anastigmat 50 m. m. lens, using the 100 feet 35 m. m. standard spool. ($150.)

2. What kind of a lens outfit do you recommend for the use in the Tropics?

3. Is there a market in the U. S. for movie films about primitive Indian life, dances, etc., from Central South America?"—CHAS. DINGLE, Juneau, Alaska.

*Reply,* by Mr. Sigismund Blumann:—The DeVry Camera is not only wonderful value for its cost but it is known to stand up under hard usage and climatic conditions.

Any reliable F3.5 lens is good and we are glad to state that most of the lenses on the market are reliable. Zeiss is standard.

The motion picture studios have been known to buy original views and travel films which they work into their continuities as local color. Eastman Kodak Company also buy for their educational library.

The whole proposition is so comparatively new that the market for films has not really had time to be organized or in fact established.

## Smoky Mountains

IN PARTS of this territory a stranger will probably find both map and compass unreliable; hence the services of a guide are almost a requisite.

*Request:*—"I expect to spend two weeks this summer on a camping trip in western North Carolina, and have had two locations in mind, namely the Smokies between Clingman's Dome and Mount Guyot and the mountain ranges around Whiteside in Jackson County. Which one of these would be preferable to a hardy camper? From a cursory survey of the maps, I would say that the region around Whiteside is less wild and rather more settled. How about the Smoky Ridges east of Clingman's Dome? Would we have any trouble as far as provisions are concerned? I would imagine that one would have to tote several days' supplies in the Smokies. I have the U. S. Geological survey sheets covering the entire section, besides the map of the proposed National Park, as published by the Department of the interior. Are those the only maps in existence and are they accurate to a degree?

Would it be advisable to carry a lightweight tent besides one's sleeping bag or would a poncho do for a shelter? I understand that the Smokies are subject to frequent showers and these come on without any warning at almost any time. Is the rock formation in the mountains such that it would provide caves or overjutting ledges for shelter and camp? Do you advise carrying rifle or revolver? And finally can you tell me whether there is any descriptive literature covering these sections?"—

FRANK A. DU BOIS, Hickory, N. C.

*Reply,* by Mr. Horace Kephart:—The maps that you mention are the only ones of the Smoky Mountains that are of any use to travelers. They give a good idea of the main features and are accurate for the settled parts adjacent to the Smokies; but in the uninhabited upper region the contours are unreliable and the watercourses generally misplaced. A stranger in the Smokies needs a guide.

You can go in a car to the Beech Fats above Smokemont on the Okona Lufty river (left prong) and that is within three miles of the top of the divide, Indian Gap. There is a fine camping site just down from the gap on the Tennessee side. From this base camp you can travel east or west along the divide without much hard climbing. Need of a guide is due to the fact that divergent trails here and there lead over abutting ridges and in some places the rib of the range is higher than the backbone, so that a stranger, naturally keeping to the heights, would go astray. Again, when the mountains are sheathed in clouds, a compass may be of little use.

There are no rest camps nor supply stations. One must carry his food and shelter—in some places water—on his own back. A poncho is useless as shelter against rain at night, unless you "tough it out" by squatting with your back against a tree and stay awake most of the time. Carry a 7 x 9 or 8 x 10 ft. waterproofed sheet with grommets along edge and set it up with back to prevailing wind; or take a very light tent.

There are many "rock-houses"—shallow caves—and projecting ledges along the sides of ridges, but none on top, and a stranger could not find one when wanted.

In summer you can very well do without a firearm. If you carry one, let it be a .22 automatic pistol with *long rifle hollow-point* cartridges. Its stopping power, with the ammunition named, exceeds that of a .32 automatic or revolver. Don't wear it in the settlements.

The only descriptive literature giving enough detail to be useful is my own book "Our Southern Highlanders."

## Polynesia

WHERE the climate as a rule "gets" the average white man, and where he must fight it all the time if he would get anywhere.

*Request:*—"1. Is there any spot in the South Seas where a white man can live for nothing or next to nothing?

2. What are the chances for a man without a trade, who would depend on his wits, to secure a decent job?

*Reply,* by Mr. J. S. Meagher:—1. Many whites are as you say living for nothing or next to nothing in Polynesia today, but the vast majority of them are beachcombers and drifters, and are without any ambition, or in fact, in many cases, common decency. If a man wants to live according to American or English standards as we know them, he can do so in Tahiti or anywhere else where civilization has come in Polynesia.

2. This is rather a hard one to answer definitely. It is always up to the individual. Some make the grade while the vast majority fail, particularly in the South Seas where the climate as a rule "gets" the average white man and one must fight it all the time to get anywhere. It takes time to savvy the native down there, and some whites never do. Perhaps this is one of the reasons of the many put forward to explain the surprizing number of misfits to be found on the better known islands.

*List of experts and instructions for obtaining free information appear in the first issue of each month.*

# *Old* SONGS *that Men have Sung*

*Conducted by* R. W. GORDON

*Devoted to outdoor songs, preferably hitherto unprinted—songs of the sea, the lumber-camps, Great Lakes, the old canal days, the negro, mountains, the pioneers, etc. Send in what you have or find, so that all may share in them. Although this department is conducted primarily for the collection and preservation of old songs, the editor will give information about modern ones when he can do so and if each request is accompanied with self-addressed envelope and sufficient reply postage* (not attached). Write to Mr. R. W. Gordon direct (*not* to the magazine), care of Adventure, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City.

I HAVE chosen these three songs very carefully and with a purpose. I have kept in mind the general reader, and have picked for him songs that are varied in type, remarkably singable, and probably new to him. But I have also kept in mind—more than I usually do perhaps—the serious student of folk-song. I would call his attention to the most curious blending of style to be found in this group. They are, and they are not, folk. Each one contains to a marked degree certain traits of genuine folk-song—even certain traits of the old ballad. And at the same time other traits are present, traits that we associate with the broadside and with author poetry. The texts are genuine, and unrevised.

### The Maid on the Shore

*(Contributed by Ben A. Ranger, California.)*

I will sing you a song,
If you will not think it wrong
To drive away sorrow and care, O,
Of sea captain and crew
Likewise a ship too
Also the maid on the shore, shore, shore,
Also the maid on the shore.

"Oh I shall die, I shall die"
The sea captain did cry
"If I can't get the Maid on the shore, O!
I'll sail the high sea,
This fair maid with me,
If she will please take a sail from the shore, shore, shore!
If she will please take a sail from the shore!"

"I have got jewels,
And I have got rings,
And I have got costly ware, O!
I'll give it all
To that pretty fair maid,
If she will please take a sail from the shore, shore, shore!
If she'll please take a sail from the shore!"

Our captain's got jewels
Our captain's got rings
Our captain has costly ware, O!
He will give it all
To the jolly good crew
If they bring him that Maid from the shore, shore, shore.
If they bring him that Maid from the shore.

With a long perseverance
They got her on board;
The captain he sat her a chair, O!
Invited her down,
To the cabin below,
Saying, "Fare ye well sorrow and care, care, care!"
Saying, "Fare ye well sorrow and care!"

"I will sing you a song,
If all think it right,
To drive away sorrow and care, O!"
She sang it so sweet,
So neat and complete,
That she sang all the seamen to sleep, sleep, sleep!
That she sang all the seamen asleep!

Then she robbed them of jewels,
She robbed them of rings,
She robbed them of costly ware, O!
And with the captain's broadsword
She made her an oar,
And she paddled her boat for the shore, shore, shore!
And she paddled her boat for the shore!

"Oh, were my men sleeping?
Or were my men mad?
Or were my men sunk in despair, O?
To let her away
With her beauty so gay,—
And again she's a maid on the shore, shore, shore!
And again she's a maid on the shore!"

"Your men were not sleeping,
Your men were not mad,
Your men were not sunk in despair, O!
But I sang them adieu,
Likewise yourself too,
And again I'm a maid on the shore, shore, shore!
And again I'm a maid on the shore!"

### A Love Song

*(Contributed by Roscoe C. Smith, West Virginia)*

When I was a young man I courted a beauty bright,
I courted her for love and my own heart's delight;
I courted her for love and her love I did obtain,
And I am sure that her parents had no right to complain.

When her father became to know
That I was courting his daughter so,
He locked her in the parlor, the parlor so secure,
And I never got sight of my love but once more.

Then I took a notion to the window I would go
To see if my truelove had forgotten me or no.
And when she saw me coming, she wrung her hands and cried;
Said, "I love the man that loves me, and will love him till I die!"

Then I took a notion to the war I would go
To see if I could relieve my poor broken heart or no.
When I got there my arms were shining bright,
And the first thought that struck me was my own heart's delight.

For four long years I had to serve a king
Before I got released to come back home again;
Some was lying wounded from mountain tops to waste,
And some was lying prest in their cold silent graves.

Then I took a notion to her father's house I would go
To see if my truelove had forgotten me or no.
When her mother saw me coming she wrung her hands and cried,
"My daughter loved you dearly and for your sake she died!"

Then I took a pain like a man to be slain,
The tears came down like showers of rain.
It's oh and it's oh the pain that I do bear,
My truelove's in her silent grave and I wish I was there!

Then I took a notion to the grave I would go
To see if I could relieve my poor broken heart or no.
Come all you truehearted lovers, come pity, pity me,
Come pity my misfortune and sad miserie!

### Pretty Maggie

(*Contributed by Charles E. Roe, Massachusetts.*)

"What seek you, pretty Maggie?
What seek you in the rain?"
"I go find my Willie
Across the Spanish Main."

"Go back, go back, pretty Maggie
Go back to yonder town.
Your Will is in the ocean
A hundred fathoms down."

"My Willie and his sailors
They seek the ships of Spain;
He'll bring me gold and silver
Across the Spanish Main!"

"Go back, go back, pretty Maggie,
Go back, my Maggie fair.
In dreams you'll see your Willie
With sea weeds in his hair."

"Good-bye, good-bye, my Willie,
He'll never come again;
His bones are in the ocean
Across the Spanish Main!"

The parson preached and prayed
He prayed and preached again
But Maggie was with Willie
Across the Spanish Main!

ADDRESS all letters containing contributions of old songs, or questions about them, to R. W. GORDON, care of *Adventure*, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City.

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# *The* Trail *Ahead*

*The next issue of* ADVENTURE, *September 1st*

*Beginning*

## Old Father of Waters

*A Serial by* Alan LeMay

The times were the fevered days just before the Civil War. The yellow Mississippi swarmed with craft feeding the promise of booming river towns with men and cargoes; good men and bad, they were, but invariably of unquestioned courage. And though the capricious and mighty river made men and broke them, as it did *Arnold Huston*, steamboat captain, yet this was the only standard it judged them by.

Two *Complete Novelettes*

## Crooked Coin

By W. C. Tuttle

The blizzards, the drouth—and *Peter Guest*. In that order would the cattlemen have named the three banes of Blue Joint Valley. Hard days had fallen on that region, but *Guest* flourished, and was in a good way to own all the Valley when one day he sent two rolls of money—one real, one dummy—to town by stagecoach, and thus started himself on a new road of fortune and offered *Hashknife Hartley* an opportunity to tackle a new mystery.

## The Gate of Life

By Georges Surdez

*General Legastel's* brave African record was become a stirring legend among the French Colonials, one to spur the ambitions and the imaginations of the younger officers. And now the desert raider, *Modhani*, lurked at Hamran Well, and *Captain Dorliac* and *Lieutenant Ternay*, under guidance of a queer old Arab, rode forth to uphold the honor of the service.

*Field Notes From*

## ADVENTURE'S Abyssinian Expedition

By Gordon MacCreagh

How Mr. MacCreagh got himself a guide named Jim; hyenas and collapsible tents; ant-hill spirits and how to disperse them—these and other problems of exploration are in Mr. MacCreagh's second report.

And—*Other Good Stories*

Conclusion of the Devil's Castle, *a treasure chase up the Orinoco*, by Arthur O. Friel; Little Brother to El Tigre, *barber or bandit?* by John Dorman; Medal Men, *marines and the power of the Haitian voodoo*, by John Webb; Dark Latitudes, *on the honor of the Chinese native*, by R. E. Hamilton

Adventure is out on the 1st and 15th of the month

don't fool yourself

# It ruins romance

Do you ever come face to face with a real case of halitosis (unpleasant breath)? Can you imagine yourself married to a person offending this way? Halitosis is the unforgivable social offence, and don't fool yourself by thinking you never have it. The insidious thing about it is that you yourself never can tell.

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*Face to face evidence*

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*—the safe antiseptic*

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